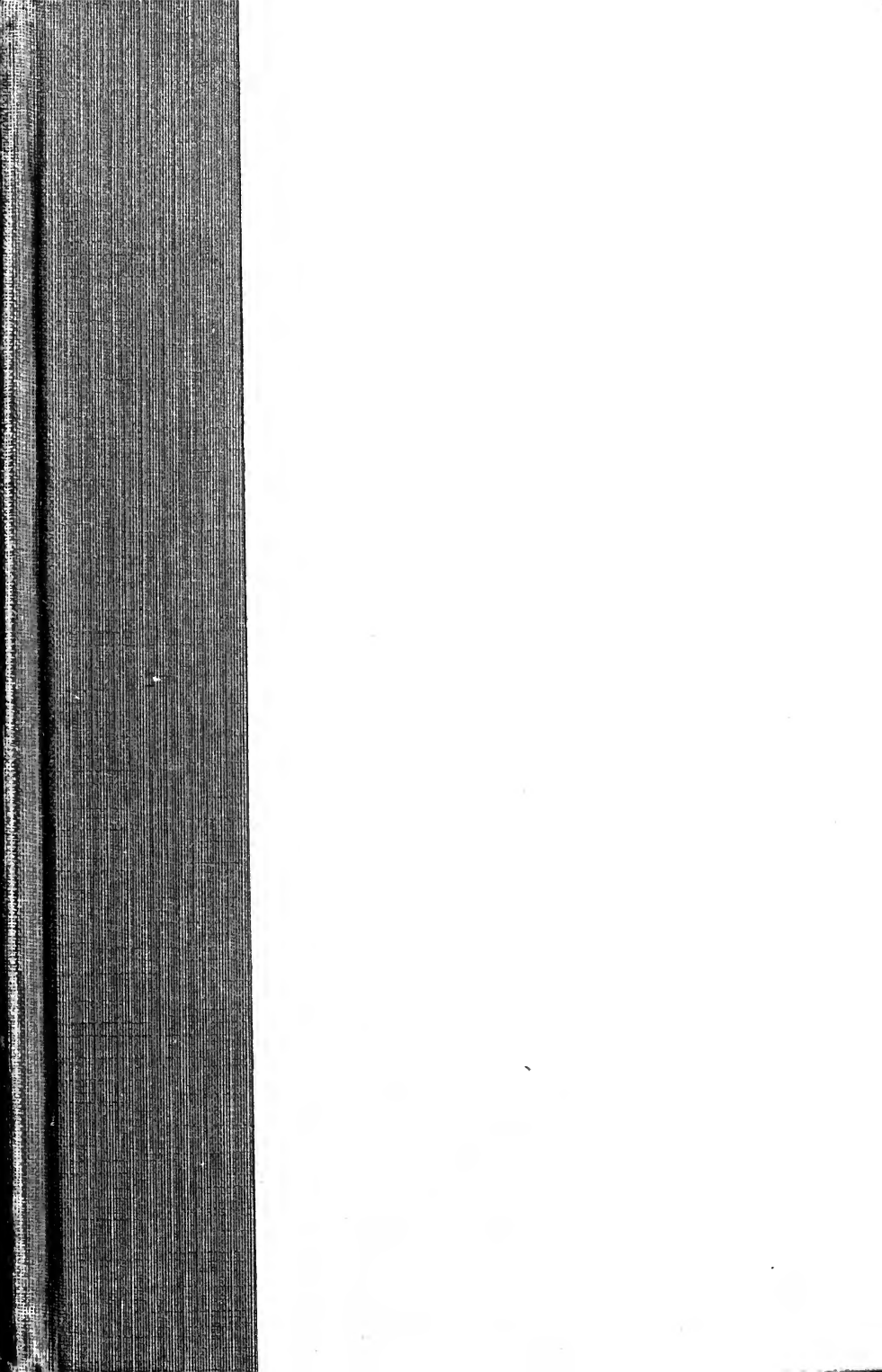




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1951

THE BOOKS OF
CHARLES E. VAN LOAN

Memorial Edition

BUCK PARVIN AND
THE MOVIES
STORIES OF THE MOVING PICTURE GAME

WITH INTRODUCTION BY
GEORGE HORACE LORIMER

BUCK PARVIN AND THE MOVIES

STORIES OF THE MOVING PICTURE GAME

BY
CHARLES E. VAN LOAN

INTRODUCTION BY
GEORGE HORACE LORIMER

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My Dear Hobert Bosworth:—

It pleases me to dedicate this book, BUCK PARVIN AND THE MOVIES, to you, the original Jimmy Montague of the stories, actor, scenario author and director.

Half of the credit is yours and half of the blame; half of the bouquets and half of the brickbats—in fact half of everything connected with this volume, with the sole exception of the author's royalties. I am making a collection of royalties at the present time.

Joking aside — an author's royalties are usually a joke — I wish thus publicly to acknowledge your valuable assistance in turning the film actor into fiction. But for this assistance, the stories would not have been written. I trust the book reviewers will remember this, in case they feel impelled to say harsh things.

In case you never had a book dedicated to you before, let me explain that it is customary for one so honored to purchase as many copies of the book as possible—at the full list price — and distribute them among his friends. Your friends are legion. I hope you still count among them,

Yours very sincerely,

CHARLES E. VAN LOAN

Los Angeles, Cal.,
August, 1915

LET'S GO! LET'S GO!

BY GEORGE HORACE LORIMER

VAN LOAN first lived, then wrote, his stories. His heroes were his friends—the best ever; his villains were his enemies—the worst. They were never hearsay heroes or villains. He had met them all in the flesh and it was not until he knew them like a book that he put them in one.

Van wrote of baseball as a lifelong fan; of golf with the sincerity of one who never allowed unfinished business to interfere with the unfinished game; of prize-fighting only after following the champ. through long weeks of training and thence into the arena; of horse-racing as a keen observer of the sport from the stable to the betting ring; and of the pictures from personal knowledge of their every phase, including the law-suit that almost every author has had with some producer.

If a man is in any sense the sum total of his heredity, the ancestors of many writers must have led singularly dull lives. Van's forebears, on the contrary, were an unusually busy lot—prominent cavemen, from whom the pre-historic Bolsheviki instinctively shied away;

well-known Aryan chiefs, who threw the spear with uncanny precision; hardy Vikings, blue-eyed and red-headed, who were always ready in their simple tenth-century way for a fight or a frolic; leading crusaders, who were continually on the jump for a dragon to slay or a lady to rescue; and restless, dauntless pioneers, always pushing Westward until they came up against the Pacific. First and last Van's ancestors must have met every one and have done everything worth while, from the days when they were happy, innocent troglodytes on up. Van himself used all their experiences and emotions in his stories—their loves, their hates, their generousities, their meannesses, their fights, their strugglings up—but most of all their splendid cleanness. For Van, too, lived a man's life and wrote man stuff. Love and sex get small place in his stories. Most men who have a clean punch in their fists have a clean punch in their hearts, too; but Van's wife is the only woman who knows anything about that side of him.

I first met Van some years ago when the moving-pictures were young and a trifle smudgy-faced. During a visit to Los Angeles, I was struck with the possibilities of this new field for the fiction writer. But when I looked up Van with the idea of suggesting a series of stories to him, I found that he had anticipated me. For months he had been on "the lot" and had been admitted to full fellowship with every

one on it, from the extra men to the directors. In fact he was all over the lot, appraising the values of custard-pie drama for fiction, probing the holiest emotions and the make-up of the he-dolls; lazying around and swapping stories with the extra men, giving his long wolf howl in the mob scenes, and looming vaguely through the smoke while the Battle of Gettysburg raged around him and the director, or while heroic firemen carried beautiful, helpless ladies out of burning buildings. Day after day, week after week, he lived the pictures until he knew them and the picture people. Then he wrote this book.

For the last six months of his life Van was one of my associates in editorial work. Out of his own knowledge, experience and understanding—for no one knew better the theory of short-story writing—he gave freely to every young writer who needed a hand up. But though that association was a pleasant one, I like best to remember the days when we were out-of-doors together at the Grand Canyon. Van needed a mountain, a horizon-meeting desert or a canyon to set him off and give him room to play. At the Grand Canyon one can walk a few hundred yards in any direction from the hotel and find himself in a great pine forest, or a pathless desert, or the solitudes of the Canyon itself. It was there we met for a fortnight once or twice a year.

Van's coming always made itself felt far

down the line beyond Williams, when the trainmen began dropping back to the smoker to hear him talk. Last year a brakeman called up to me from a station platform: "Van went through yesterday on number three," and a little later our conductor stopped and, smiling reminiscently, exclaimed: "That Van Loan is sure a case!"

Baron Brant, the Hopis, the Navajos and all the old-timers were usually at the station to meet him, and as the train pulled in his long wolf howl went up in greeting. Then some way the Canyon side, that had been drowsing in its hushed, age-long way, woke up for an hour, with Van getting acquainted again and apparently in twenty places all at once. Over at Hopi house the drums beat louder and the Navajos danced more furiously; down at the corral the guides yelled their welcome; in the hotel lobby the Baron alternately beamed at Van's affectionate epithet, "miserable old man," and winced under the heavy hand of his friend; from the floor above, dignified old Thomas Moran, irreverently dubbed Kid Moran by Van, left for a moment the picture that he was painting; and along the rim the tourists received priceless, if somewhat fanciful, information in reply to their questions.

A tourist on the Canyon's rim,
A simple tourist was to him,
And nothing more.

Alas! even as he talked to them Van was sizing up some rock that was balanced temptingly over the abyss, for he had a vice. He liked to roll rocks and, unless he was watched, he rolled them. Once out beyond Desert View, forty miles up the Canyon, where there was no danger of "beaning" an inoffensive tourist below, he triumphantly disclosed a crowbar that he had hidden under the carriage robe, and spent a pleasant afternoon working with my two boys to dislodge a rock that was as big as a piano. They were an hour putting it over, but what a noble smash it made, and how it did roll down that five thousand feet, and what a long wolf howl of triumph Van let out as it toppled over the rim! Perhaps all this will make the judicious grieve, but then grieving is the best and about the only thing the judicious do.

Half the time Van was an overgrown boy—playing around like a shaggy, lumbering, barking, pawing puppy. But when he was in a grown-up mood he was a man all over. This side of him came out on the long walks, when he talked in his vivid, forceful way about men and books and affairs; or on the hard all-day rides down in the Canyon, when there was so much to see that we talked little; or in the evenings on the rim and in the camp below, when night spread through the Canyon and finally covered the glowing sky above.

There is something very positive about the desert country. One likes it or dislikes it; but

no one is ever indifferent to it. Van loved it; and it was his oft-expressed hope that the further development of the Canyon would never fall into the hands of anyone who did not love it, too—that it would always be safeguarded from those who would jazz it and exploit it and Coney Islandize any corner of it in the name of improvement. That would be like slapping God on the wrist.

Last summer I went back to the Canyon and everyone talked a good deal about Van—that is, everyone except the Baron. At first he looked at me a little mistily, and I think he was recalling the last time when Van was there, too, slapping him on the back and jovially greeting him as a “miserable old man.” I wished that I could make him beam and wince again in the old way, before he began to shake hands decorously with his rather conventional guests, but that was “Van’s stuff.” So I shook hands like any proper tourist and went out to the rim, where a very learned gentleman with a very correct New England ancestry was expounding the theory and geology of the Canyon to a group of interested hearers. I have never met anyone with a more absolutely faultless manner. He both explained and apologized for the Canyon’s crudities in one breath. I rather gathered that he would have found the geology of the Alps more to his liking, if certain events had not made them temporarily inaccessible to American tourists of refinement. I do not think

that Van had very much geology, but I felt as I listened that he had known the Canyon in a way that the learned Easterner would never know it. Doubtless his unimpeachably correct ancestry went back through libraries and monasteries and temples to a cultured cave home, while Van's ancestors spent their lives preparing for descendants who would be good Americans when the time came; and Van was one hundred per cent American. That may explain why he hated poor sports, parlor Bolsheviki and quitters; and why mountains, canyons, deserts and men took precedence in his mind over books about them. One man sees strata where another man sees God.

Turn the page and you will find Van in his book.

Let's Go! Let's Go!

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BUCK PARVIN AND THE MOVIES

THE EXTRA MAN AND THE MILKFED LION

WHEN Tommy Dennis began to love the beautiful and talented Myrtle Manners he was an Arab trader squatting in the shade of a date-palm, and she was a Christian maiden—a captive in the harem of Sheik Abdallah, the Scourge of the Sahara.

When first he saw her face at the barred window, lovely in spite of the fear and grief it depicted, Tommy was conscious of a sudden delightful shock that fluttered to the tips of his fingers and toes; and when she stretched out her arms and wept, every sob went straight to Tommy's susceptible heart.

He held his breath as he watched her make a perilous descent from the roof of the harem by means of a rope ladder furnished by a faithless slave, the same who later paid for his treachery to his cruel master, the sheik, by being hurled from that very roof upon the spears of the tribe.

Tommy Dennis was among those present when the beautiful stranger fled from the

sheik's oasis on Sharkey, the trained camel; and he murmured a brief but fervent prayer that the ungainly brute might not stumble. After a fashion of his own the Scourge of the Sahara offered up the same supplication—but it was Sharkey's lame foreleg he was thinking of, and not the neck of the Christian maiden. Camels are expensive beasts, requiring time and patience in training; and Abdallah, besides being a sheik and a scourge, was also heavy actor and producing director for the Titan Company and, as such, responsible for its animal stuff.

Later, as a wild Bedouin, armed with a bell-muzzled weapon and mounted upon a milk-white steed that manifested true Arabic love for its master by biting him severely upon the knee-cap, Tommy scoured the plain in pursuit of the lumbering Sharkey, again securing fleeting glimpses of the lovely stranger as she clung desperately to the camel's saddle. Sharkey's footwork was very erratic, consisting of two speeds forward, one sidewise and an abrupt reverse.

After several spirited sprints over dunes and across dry river bottoms, all of which Sharkey managed to win by a neck under shrill protest, the Bedouins, led by Sheik Abdallah, engaged in mortal combat with French troops—and Tommy Dennis was shot dead at the first fire. He did not mind this at all, being used to it; but he was very much annoyed at his Arab steed for kicking him as he fell. Neither were his

feelings soothed to any great extent by alighting heavily upon the belled muzzle of his ancient weapon.

Tommy was resurrected in a short blue jacket, which puckered abominably under the arms, and moth-eaten red trousers several sizes too small for him—a private in the corporal's guard and an eyewitness to the affecting reunion of the lovers inside the French lines, the sandy river bottom doing duty as the Desert of Sahara.

He saw the beautiful Christian maiden fall fainting from Sharkey's back into the arms of her sweetheart, a tall, handsome fellow in the uniform of a captain of the Foreign Legion—he who had just slain the wicked Abdallah in a thrilling encounter with cavalry sabers, it being well known that a sheik never fights with anything else if he can help it.

Tommy was not pleased with the ardent manner in which the gallant officer clasped the limp and yielding form to his bosom and pressed the parted lips with a neatly waxed mustache and imperial. The late Abdallah was not pleased either, judging by his comment. "That was rotten!" he shouted. "No good at all! Myrtle, you forgot to register a recognition before you pulled the fall. Jack, you cloaked the best part of the action with your shoulder when you ran in. Do it again, and try to get some real feeling into it—if you know how."

“Oooo-issch!” sneezed the long-suffering Sharkey, nipping the director upon the arm.

“Ouch!” yelled Mr. Abdallah, whose other name was Jimmy Montague. “Get that fool brute back where he belongs! Now then, all set, Myrtle? Take up a few feet of waste on that film. . . . Ready—action—go! . . . What’s the matter with that infernal camel? Come on with him! . . . Look down at Jack, Myrtle! . . . Now fall! . . . Oh, hold her close to you, man! That’s something like it! . . . Well, it went better that time, but it’s still rotten in spots. Throw out your arms when you fall, Myrtle. Don’t flop down like a sack of meal. And sprinkle some water here—Sharkey kicks up an awful dust when he stops quick.”

Seven times the beautiful maiden fell into the arms of her beloved before the Scourge of the Sahara announced himself as satisfied, and Sharkey was led away, bubbling and gurgling with rage and indignation. Seven times Tommy Dennis stood stiffly in the corporal’s guard, blushing behind his makeup, trembling in every fiber of his being.

This was the lady of his dreams; he had found her at last. What difference did it make to Tommy’s fluttering heart that she was the Queen of the Movies, at a salary of one hundred dollars a week, and he but a despised extra man at three dollars a day? Cupid, careless little rascal with his bow and arrow, might take the blame for that. Tommy had found her—that

was the main thing—and having found her he was forced to endure seeing her kissed back to consciousness by a supercilious person who wore a handkerchief in his cuff and addressed all extra men as “Here, you!” Tommy had not liked the handsome leading man any too well to begin with. He loathed him now.

It was a slight source of comfort to note the businesslike way in which the young woman freed herself from Jack La Rue’s embraces the instant the camera man’s hand ceased to move. Tommy also observed that at the finish of the scene she walked away toward the temporary dressing tent, without so much as a word or a glance behind her.

“I’ll bet she doesn’t like him!” thought Tommy, with a swift fluttering sensation under the blue coat. Then later: “I don’t see how any nice girl could!”

Tommy Dennis was twenty—he stood six feet in his stockings; his nose was straight; his eyes were clear; and, better than all else, his heart was clean. He knew as soon as he saw Myrtle Manners at the barred window of Abdallah’s harem that he had never really loved before. He realized that his high-school affairs, which had seemed so serious at the time, were but the silly flirtations of childhood; and the brief but burning passion for the lunch-counter waitress was a youthful indiscretion. By the same process of reasoning he was not more than seven min-

utes in convincing himself that he would never love again.

When one is twenty it is easy to believe that true love is the only real thing in the world, and fame and fortune but the tinsel stage settings for the One Big Scene, in which the right man plays opposite the right woman forever, and there are no makeovers, no cut-ins and no fogged films.

He wondered as he discarded the dusty uniform of the Legion and washed the paint from his face whether she had noticed him at all. He decided that it was within the range of possibility. He recalled that she was standing behind the camera when the Bedouins swept yelling upon the French outpost. She must have seen the rider who plunged from his saddle at the first volley; and on the whole he was rather glad that his horse had kicked him. It was the sort of thing to draw the spectator's attention. He ceased to regret the bruise on his hip where he had fallen upon his gun. She might have seen that he was painfully hurt as he limped away—might even have been sorry for him. A bruised hip was a small price to pay for a pitying glance from those soft brown eyes. He pictured her as asking questions about him and receiving truthful replies:

“Who is that good-looking young man over there—the one who made such a daring fall?”

“That is Tom Dennis, quite an unusual sort of an extra man. He is a fearless chap; never

stops at anything when it comes to making a good picture. He's going to be a great stunt actor some day—that boy."

Tommy was recalled from a dream of imaginary conversation by some of the genuine article close at hand. Buck Parvin was speaking. Buck was a moving-picture cowpuncher, acting during every waking moment. His street costume consisted of a widebrimmed hat of gray felt, a blue flannel shirt, a red bandanna for a cravat, a leather vest thickly studded with shining disks of brass, lavender trousers tucked into highheeled boots; and on special occasions he wore angora chaps and enormous spurs, which tinkled musically as he walked. His hatband was made of rattlesnake skin, and distributed about his person he wore several pounds of Indian beadwork and Mexican silver jewelry. Buck Parvin was one character actor who never left his makeup in the dressing room at the end of the day's work, having, as he said, but three complete changes of wardrobe—put on, take off and go without.

"Well, kid," said Buck, "what do you think of the new leading lady? Quite a doll, ain't she? Pretty soft for that big stiff, La Rue! I'd like to have his job for about a week. I bet ole Jimmy Montague wouldn't have to bawl me out for not huggin' her hard enough. I'd play that scene for nothing. Yes, sir! Myrtle is certainly some dolly!"

"Aw, put the diffuser on that kind of talk!"

growled Tommy. "You've got an awful nerve calling her by her first name."

"Oho!" chuckled Buck. "You kind of like her your own self, don't you, kid? I reckon you'll be round here to-morrow acting all over the place. Maybe they'll have a makeover on some of them chases and you'll get a chance to pull another phony fall. Take it from me, Tommy, throw away that slide-trombone of a gun next time, unless you want to bust yourself plumb in two. And lemme tell you something else: Whenever you're on the ground, with horses coming behind you, lay still! They'll all jump over you. You began to crawl and ole Pieface just missed you by an inch."

"Darn it!" said Tommy. "I wasn't crawling; I had to get off that gun."

"Now if you want to catch the lady's eye," said Buck mischievously, "do a real fall! I got mine—right in the eye of the camera too. I thumbed ole Pieface in the neck and he went straight up like he was goin' over backward; an' I slid off him as easy as rolling out of bed. Not a bruise on me. And, believe me, the lady seen me do it; she was lookin' right at me!"

"You make me tired!" said Tommy, grinning in spite of himself. "I fell like a man that was shot."

"You limped like it too," said Buck with a chuckle. "We both of us might have broke our necks and it wouldn't have made any difference. You and me ain't got a Chinaman's chance for

a pleasant look from her! They won't be no extry men in Myrtle's picture a-tall. None whatever! If she's going to fall for anybody round here it'll be La Rue."

"I don't believe it," said Tommy stubbornly. "Why, she hardly speaks to him."

"Listen at our banty rooster crow!" mocked Buck. "Tommy, you're a lovely little feller, and I like you; but there's a whole lot you don't know about women. Yes, when it comes to females I should say you was consid'able ignorant. Let your Uncle Buck steer you. He's a pretty wise Injun on this skirt thing."

"Huh!" snorted Tommy. "What do you know about women?"

"Everything," said Buck calmly. "Everything what is. I ought to. Women have throwed me higher in the air than you've ever been away from home, Tommy. Yes, sir; they cert'n'y had their fun with ole Buck—but he got a line on 'em, you bet! Take it from me, it's the dough that counts with the dolls—the dinero; the iron men; the large, smilin' yaller boys. We ain't got no bankroll, Tommy, and we're safe. The camera ain't focused on us at all—see? We're way over yonder on the other side of the hill, plumb out of the picture. As soon as this jane finds out that La Rue drags down one-fifty a week, she's goin' to go ropin' for him."

"Pshaw!" said Tommy. "The trouble with

you, Buck, is that you haven't met the right kind of women."

"I ain't, hey?" demanded Parvin, as he fastened his bandanna with the huge silver ring set with turquoise matrices. "Oh, no; I suppose not. There's the women what likes you and there's the women what don't; and they're the only kinds what is. Take it from me, I've met a many of both varieties—an' they was all out for the dough."

II

Love at first sight is a beautiful theory; but in every-day life there is such a thing as taking a long critical second look. Tommy took several, and each time he saw Myrtle Manners in a new part he discovered added charms. An extra man may look at a moving-picture queen if he has the luck to be selected by the director for a day's work.

Each morning Tommy reported faithfully at the Titan headquarters, and when Jimmy Montague crooked his forefinger and said, "I want you, kid!" that day was ringed on Tommy's calendar with a circle of gold. When the director shook his head and said, "Nothing doing!" Tommy slouched away, with his lower lip drooping and his hands crammed deep in his pockets, a picture of blighted hope.

As the Cattle Queen, in sombrero and short

riding skirt, Miss Manners captivated Tommy by her dash and daring in the saddle, and even Buck Parvin admitted that she "sat up in the middle of a hawss" like a cattle queen born. As the brave but heartbroken hospital nurse in the Civil War picture, All for Dixie, she plumbed unsuspected depths of sentiment; but when she played the deserted wife and mother in The Cashier's Disgrace, and wept over the borrowed baby, she touched Tommy in his tenderest spot. He was all hers from that moment.

Then came the wonderful day when she spoke to him. The performers had gone out "on a location" to the outskirts of the city and had been delayed beyond the noon hour. Tommy volunteered to find the nearest restaurant and bring back food.

"Two ham sandwiches and a pint of milk, please," was what she said to him; but Tommy walked in a daze for the rest of the day.

He read a dozen meanings into that innocent remark and was pleased with every one of them.

An actor employed by the Titan Company and working under Director Jimmy Montague had no sinecure. Montague had a reputation as a producer of sensational film dramas. He spent his nights in thinking up new and thrilling stunts for his actors to perform, and in devising scenarios to fit the stunts.

Jimmy's people never knew, when they re-

ported for work on a new picture, whether they would be required to leap off a cliff into forty feet of water, go up in a balloon or track a real lion to the camera's eye. Montague's leading man had to box like a Corbett, wrestle like a Muldoon, ride like a Cody, swim like a fish, climb crags like a goat, dress like a Brummel, make love like a Sothern, and face wild animals like a—Colonel.

Jimmy's specialty was animal stuff. After his tremendous success with *The King of Beasts*—a three-reel production that appeared in nearly every country under the sun and yielded a dollar harvest which remains a record to this day—the Titan owners saw a great light and began to invest in wild animals.

They had objected when Jimmy insisted on buying a mangy, toothless lion for use in a single production; the poor old brute turned out to be the most profitable investment the company had ever made, paying some eight thousand per cent. With one lion as a nucleus the Titan people rapidly acquired quite a respectable menagerie, and Jimmy Montague's animal stuff became known from St. Petersburg to Tasmania.

There was Selim, the elephant—a star in *The Rajah's Revenge* and *The Heart of Hindustan*. Selim was a Hamburg-trained pachyderm, with a fair working knowledge of the German language and a painstaking attention to detail that

made him a remarkable moving-picture actor. No desert scene was complete without the camels—Sharkey, Old Blue, Betsy and Mame—unwilling but efficient performers. The lions—King, Duke, Bertha and Babe—had thrilled audiences all over the world; and the monkeys, wolves, snakes, coyotes, elk, deer, hyenas, and the nearsighted comedy tapir, also contributed their bit to the entertainment of the masses.

Every time Sam Packard, the purchasing agent, had a chance to buy a wild animal he snapped it up and looked confidently to Jimmy Montague to invent a scenario to fit the creature.

One morning Montague received a telegram from the head of the firm in New York.

“Jungle stuff worked to death,” it read. “Get new scenario quick. Use all animals.”

“There’s gratitude for you,” growled Jimmy as he tossed the telegram to Jack La Rue, who happened to be present. “How the deuce can I ring in lions and elephants and camels without a jungle scenario?”

“Blest if I know!” said La Rue, lighting a cigarette. “You never see ’em anywhere else except in a circus, and——”

“Bully boy!” shouted Montague. “Great suggestion, Jack!”

“What suggestion?” demanded the amazed leading man.

“Why, the circus!” said Jimmy. “It’s never

been done. We'll make a circus picture and it'll be a knockout!"

"You're a wizard, Jimmy!" said La Rue. "Give you a toothpick to start with and you'll have a lumberyard in ten minutes. How do you do it?"

Jimmy Montague pressed three buttons. The stenographer was first to appear.

"Send a telegram to the house in New York and ask 'em if they've got any stock films of circus parades. Get that off quick! That parade stuff will do fine for cut-ins," said Montague.

Ben Leslie, the property man, and Joe Bates, in charge of the wardrobe department, entered together.

"Joe," said the director, "Jack here wants some silk fleshings—full tights; white or pink will do. Manners ought to be a bareback rider, I suppose—no; hold on. Maybe we can't get anybody to double for her in a real riding act. I've got it! Why not make her a lion tamer? The very thing! Joe, get Manners a Spanish outfit and a lion-tamer's whip. I'll need some ringmaster's boots. That's all I can think of now; but it's enough to get busy on. I'll give you a list later."

"Goin' to do a circus picture?" asked Ben Leslie. Ben was a lean, saturnine individual, as remarkable a personage in his way as any member of the company. Had he been ordered to produce the Kohinoor immediately he would

have nodded twice, shifted his fine-cut from one cheek to the other and gone out without a word. And he would have brought back the Kohinoor—or the next best thing. Nothing surprised him; nothing daunted him.

“Yes,” said Jimmy Montague, “we’re going to do a circus picture. Get busy on it, quick! Ward Brothers’ Circus is wintering down at Santa Monica. You can borrow a lot of junk from them. You know Billy Ward, don’t you?”

“Sure!” said Ben. “Worked for him once.”

“Gee-whiz!” said Montague. “Is there anybody in the world you haven’t worked for—once?”

“Reckon not,” said Ben, and departed.

“This will be some scenario!” remarked Jimmy to his leading man.

In his brilliant mind the toothpick was already expanding into a telegraph pole; the lumberyard would come later.

“Yes, but I don’t get you,” said La Rue. “What am I supposed to be in this picture? An acrobat?”

“Bareback rider,” said Jimmy succinctly. “In love with the lion tamer. So am I. I’m the ringmaster. We can work up a lot of jealousy stuff. I crab your act. Hit your horse with the whip when you go to do a jump-up. You fake a fall—all that ‘Cur-rse you, Jack Dalton!’ business. I ain’t got it straightened out, yet, of course; but for the blowoff Myrtle’s lion-taming stunt goes wrong, I get cold feet,

and you tear in and save the lady. Ain't that great?"

"Me?" said La Rue, laying one hand upon his breast. "Me—save the lady? Me—in the cage with a lion? Not on your life! Suppose something goes wrong and he takes a wallop at me?"

"Forget it!" said the director. "We'll use old Duke for the cage scenes. You know what a gentle animal he is! Brought up on a bottle, Kelly tells me."

"So was I," said La Rue; "but I'll eat meat now. That milkfed business doesn't signify anything, Jimmy."

"Oh, rats!" said Montague. "Duke's got the disposition of a great big dog."

"No, he ain't," said the leading man earnestly. "He's got the disposition of a great big cat—and the claws and the teeth, and all the rest of it. Because he hasn't killed anybody yet is no sign that he won't before he's through. Nix on this tame-lion stuff—they're all wild, I tell you! And Manners wouldn't want to work with a lion either."

"She's done animal pictures before," said Jimmy. "That girl ain't afraid of anything."

La Rue passed over the slur.

"There's such a thing as being too brave for your own good," he insisted. "I'm as game as anybody, Jimmy, but it wouldn't get me anything to be clawed up by a milkfed lion. If Duke doesn't look right to me you'll have to

double me in that cage scene. I won't work. I'm an actor, not an animal trainer."

"Oh, well," said Montague, "if it comes right down to cases we can let that Dennis kid double you and pull off the rescue; but there ain't any need of it. I've been in the cage with Duke a dozen times myself. He wouldn't harm a fly. You ought to know that I never ask you to take chances. I never got you hurt yet, did I?"

"Oh, no; not at all," said La Rue with sarcasm. "I suppose I wasn't hurt that time when I got pounded on the rocks by the surf up on the Malibu coast. There wasn't a spot on me as big as your hand that wasn't cut or bruised; but of course that didn't hurt! I just thought it did—that's all."

"The trouble with you, Jack," said Montague, "is too darned much temperament. Beat it out of here! I'm going to rib up this scenario."

"You remember, now," warned La Rue. "If Duke doesn't look right to me—nothing doing! You'll have to double me in that scene."

"Get out of here!" said Montague.

Left alone with his toothpick he drew a sheet of paper to him and scrawled upon it.

"The Jaws of Death," said he with a grin. "I guess that's a perfectly miserable title!"

III

AT eleven o'clock Jimmy Montague pushed his chair back from his desk and gazed upon a masterpiece completed.

"If that ain't doping out canned drama while you wait I don't know what is," he remarked with a satisfied sigh. "If the two big stunts in the lion's cage stand up all right I've got another grand picture for the poor old boss. If they fizzle—good night! We'll try fifty-one and fifty-three first. If Duke won't work with a woman I can turn the lion-taming stunt into something else and still have a circus picture."

One very fine thing about the moving-picture business is that no shred of an idea is ever wasted. Scenarios and action plots are subject to change at an instant's notice. A camera-caught accident often forms the basis of a new film drama. Jimmy Montague had once written a scenario round a leading man's broken leg. The picture of the fall from the roof was too good to waste.

The Jaws of Death, as articulated on paper by J. Montague, called for two reels of film, seventeen separate backgrounds or locations—as they are always called when the photographs must be made outside of the studio—and fifty-five scenes. The two big stunts in the lion's cage were numbered fifty-one and fifty-three—

almost the closing scenes of the picture. These would be photographed first for economic reasons.

In Jimmy Montague's early days with the Titan Company, when the moving-picture business was in its swaddling clothes and all the men connected with the infant enterprise were learning something daily from the best and the bitterest teacher in the world, Jimmy worked forty men and women for two weeks, consumed miles of film leading up to his one big stunt scene; and he found when he got to it that it was a physical impossibility. The Titan people paid the bills, but the telegrams from New York were hot enough to melt the glass insulators in their flight. Jimmy managed to hold his job, but it was a close call; and after that he decided to make sure of his stunts first. If they succeeded, well and good. If they failed, the loss in time, money and raw film was trifling; and the scenario was deftly twisted about to meet the limitations of man or beast.

This time the limitations were those of Duke, the performing lion; and the circus drama as originally planned would stand or fall upon that brute's behavior. Scenes fifty-one and fifty-three, marked simply Interior Cage, were the crucial ones; so Jimmy set about his newest sensational production tail-first as it were.

In the darkened theater devoted to the Movie Muse the pictures flit upon the screen, incident

fitting smoothly into incident to tell a connected story; but in the making a photo-play is the wildest crazy-quilt imaginable—a headless, tailless, cubist affair without form or coherence.

Scenes are photographed with an eye to background or location and no regard for sequence. The complete plan exists only in the magnificent mind of the producing director. Picking up the plot of a moving picture by following the actors at their work would be as easy a task as unraveling Monte Cristo by reading chapters at random. This is one reason why seasoned moving-picture actors seldom ask questions. The director tells them what to do and they do it.

Thus Myrtle Manners did not ask questions when she was given a Spanish costume, though she wondered what she was to do with the short rawhide whip.

Jack La Rue did not need to ask questions. He scowled as he inserted his manly form into pink silk fleshings. Jack did not like animals of any sort, and animals did not like him.

Tommy Dennis, picked out of the squad of extra men at the usual morning inspection, asked but one question as he tugged at another suit of pink silk fleshings.

"Say, Buck," said he, "is—is Miss Manners in this picture?"

"I dunno," said Buck, gloomily surveying a clown costume. "All they told me was that I got to ride that ornery trick mule. Jimmy Montague is fixin' to get my head kicked off,

I reckon. Look at the clothes they wished on me! What are you made up for, Tommy? The flyin' trapeze or just a parachute jump? Where do these fool pants hook on to the shirt?"

Tommy Dennis, however, had lapsed into dreamy silence. Miss Manners, he reflected, had never seen him in tights. He looked down at his symmetrical limbs with a grave air of satisfaction. A costume of this sort—silk—ought to make a difference.

Charlie Jennings, a retired stock actor of long experience and no small skill with grease paints, entered the extra men's dressing room, carrying a makeup box and a black, curly wig.

"You're elected to be made handsome, Tommy," said he. "Montague says for me to make you up to double La Rue."

To double the leading man! Tommy's heart skipped a beat and then hurried wildly as if to catch up.

"S-a-a-y!" exclaimed Buck, suddenly jealous. "What's coming off here? If this is goin' to be ridin' stunts, why can't I double it? Tommy can have the mule. I can pull stuff on a hawss that La Rue—the big dub!—never knowed was in the book! I'm going to make a holler about this! I'm a rider; I ain't no rough-and-tumble comedian. There's favoritism in this joint!"

"Oh, I guess you don't want this job so bad as you think you do," said Jennings as he dark-

ened Tommy's eyebrows. "I've got an idea you'd pass it up if they offered it to you."

"What's the stunt?" asked Tommy, trying his best to appear blasé and unconcerned.

"Lion stuff!" said the old actor. "Hold that eye still! How do you expect I'm going to make you up if you wiggle all over the place?"

"Lions!" ejaculated Buck. "Excuse me a minute till I put my cue back in the rack. Tommy, you win a job and welcome. I'll take a chance with the mule. Ole Buck here is awful careless, but he ain't mislaid no lions lately. Huh-uh!"

"Are you afraid of lions, kid?" asked Jennings. "Would you go in the cage with Duke?"

"Which one is Duke?" asked Tommy.

"The big one. Think you'd be afraid?"

"Did La Rue pass it up?" Tommy had no intention of committing himself until he knew more of the details.

"Well," said Jennings with tact, "I don't know as Jack's really leary; I heard him tellin' Miss Manners just now that she might be a lion tamer, but he thanked God he was an actor."

"Is that little gal goin' into a lion's cage?" demanded Buck incredulously.

"Sure!" said Jennings. "She's game as they make 'em."

"I never was much afraid of lions," said Tommy. "Even when I was just a little shaver I used to look 'em right between the eyes and make 'em turn away."

“Ho!” sniffed Buck. “But you was outside the cage when you done that hypnotic stuff. It makes a heap of difference to a lion whether you’re outside lookin’ in or inside with him tryin’ to get out. Don’t overlook that, son!”

“Well, you needn’t worry about Duke,” said Jennings. “He’s kind and gentle, and works fine in a picture. I wouldn’t be afraid to lead him right down the middle of the street by his whiskers.”

Buck cackled derisively.

“My! My! That actor man sure don’t need no press agent!” he said. “Tommy, you know me! I’m your friend. I like you; but you don’t resemble no Daniel-in-the-den to me, and don’t you let nobody kid you into pullin’ no lion’s whiskers. It ain’t bein’ done this season at all. You could put a million dollars in a cage with a lion—an ole, sickly lion—a lion that had run round nights and dissipated, and never took no kind of care of himself, and wasn’t enjoyin’ good health—you could stack that dough right up to the roof, and do you think I’d go in there after it? Not in four thousand years! No, sir! A lion has got something on you any time he starts—an’ he don’t say nothin’ to you before he starts neither. Just b-zing!—and first thing you know you ain’t got no face left. I claim I’m gamer ’n any man ought to be and have good sense. I’ve had the cold chills sometimes thinkin’ about the darn fool chances I’ve took; but little ole Buck Parvin in a cage with a lion?

Huh-uh! My folks raised me to know better!"

"What are you trying to do—scare somebody?" snapped Jennings. "Don't pay any attention to him, kid. This is a tame lion."

"Tame—hell!" snorted Buck. "They ain't no tame lions!"

IV

DUKE woke up when Tim Kelly and the crew of the animal farm began to trundle his cage toward the canvas studio. He blinked lazily, shook a fly off his nose, yawned twice, and prepared to take a languid interest in his surroundings. It was as if he said:

"Well, boys, what new foolishness is this?"

Nothing that men might do could surprise Duke very much. Beginning life under the canvas of a circus tent, he had seen human beings since the day his eyes opened. Even before he saw them he had smelled them. He had studied them covertly for years, without arriving at a definite conclusion regarding them; there was about him something of the impartial air of one who suspends judgment until all of the evidence has been presented. He looked upon the entire human race with a mixture of grave dignity, quiet patience and noble condescension.

Certainly these two-legged animals were queer creatures—the moving-picture ones queerest of all—but they were good to him; and

Duke recognized a certain obligation on his part. He did not know why they wished him to do foolish and undignified things, but it was plain to him that these things pleased his friend Tim Kelly, the boss animal man; so whenever he was called upon, Duke stalked gravely through his part like the obliging old gentleman he was.

Duke liked the animal farm. He liked the long, lazy California days. There were no jolting street parades; no stuffy circus tent with its endless stream of gaping faces; no irritating rattle and thunder of night freights. If Duke had planned a Heaven for tired old lions it would have been like the animal farm, with its kindly attendants, large, comfortable cages, good food and long stretches of drowsy inactivity.

He had but one disquieting memory left him from his circus days—the memory of a swarthy man who made him leap through a fiery hoop, stand on his hind legs, and roll over. Before every performance the swarthy man came into the cage and beat Duke unmercifully with a rawhide whip.

This memory returned vividly whenever Duke saw a whip in a trainer's hand. At such times he would sit up and strike at the rawhide, growling ferociously and showing his teeth, as he had always done when the swarthy man whipped him. He continued to do this long after he learned that, though Tim Kelly might

sometimes show him a whip, he never struck him with it.

“Poor old felly!” Tim would say in his soft, crooning voice. “’Tis not me ye’re scoldin’ at, darlin’; it’s the whip. Ye’ve been abused, Juke—bad luck to the brute that done it to ye!”

Then Tim would toss the whip out of the cage and rub the short hair on Duke’s nose; and Duke would stretch himself luxuriously, making gentle dabs at Tim with his great cushioned paws by way of explaining to him that habit bound lions too, and that his growl did not really mean anything of a personal nature. Upon this habit Jimmy Montague had built his scenario. If Duke would growl at a whip in the hands of a woman the picture was as good as made.

Once in the studio Duke looked about him with a patronizing stare, sniffed once or twice, and then, dropping his nose between his paws, composed himself for a nap. He had been fed heavily early in the day and he was very sleepy.

“Ah!” said Jimmy Montague, very elegant in a ring-master’s shining tile, cutaway coat, white moleskin breeches, and top boots. “That’s my notion of the ideal moving-picture actor! He rolls in, on time to the dot; rubbers round once to see that everything is all right, and then goes to sleep till he’s wanted. He never forgets his makeup and doesn’t try to do any of the director’s thinking for him.”

Jimmy crossed toward La Rue, who was sit-

ting on a bench, his pink-silk legs crossed and the eternal cigarette between his lips.

"You see how quiet he is," urged Montague. "He's as easy to get along with as a Newfoundland puppy."

La Rue scowled and shook his head.

"The only lion I'll ever go in the cage with will be a dead one," said he. "He's asleep now, Jimmy; but I've seen these tame wild animals wake up at the wrong time—and so have you."

Miss Manners, more beautiful than ever in the Spanish costume, a single yellow rose in her dark hair, looked at Duke anxiously. Tommy Dennis, modestly smothering his silken grandeur in a shabby raincoat, took up a protecting position beside her. After a time he dared to speak, feeling that his elevation to the part of understudy to the leading man permitted him a certain amount of latitude.

"Aw, he's all right!" said Tommy, nodding toward the sleeping beast. "He never hurt anybody in his life, Miss Manners. He's what they call a milkfed lion."

The girl indulged him with a smile.

"He looks peaceful enough now," said she. "I'm always a little nervous with animals, though. Are you?"

"I never have been yet," said Tommy, skirting the thin edge between truth and fiction.

"Did you ever work with this lion before?"

"Not with this one," said Tommy, allowing

the lady to draw her own conclusions from the slight shading of the adjective.

"You're doubling La Rue, aren't you?" asked the girl, glancing at the wig. "You don't look much like him."

"I thank you," said Tommy, and they laughed together. Immediately he felt a subtle bond of sympathy between them and risked a bold stroke. "You don't care very much for him yourself, do you?" asked Tommy, marveling at his own audacity.

"I'm not answering questions this morning," smiled Miss Manners.

"You don't have to," said Tommy bluntly. "I know!"

"Indeed?" The slow, rising inflection warned Tommy that it was time to change the subject.

"Say, what about this stunt we're going to do?" he asked. "All they told me was that it was lion stuff."

He said it with the airy nonchalance of one to whom lions were nothing—the merest trifle—an every-day affair.

"I don't know what the action is myself yet," said the girl. "You're not in the first scene, I believe; but in the next one you're to carry me out of the cage."

"Great!" ejaculated Tommy, who at that moment would not have exchanged places with any living man, lion or no lion. "That ought to make a swell picture!"

"Yes," said Miss Manners; "but don't you forget that it's my face that you want to keep toward the camera. I don't want anybody to think that I had to be doubled in this scene!"

"Leave it to me!" said Tommy. "I don't care whether they see me or not, so long as I can help you make a good picture of it. And let me tell you something: When you go in there, look at that lion right between the eyes! Whatever you do, don't turn your head away for a second! Just keep your nerve with you; and remember that a lion can't do a thing so long as you look him square in the eye."

"I've heard that before," said the girl.

"Sure you have, and it's true! I've pulled that eye stuff on lions and things ever since I was a kid, and it's worked every time."

V

WHILE Tommy was gilding the dull edges of fact with the glittering alloy of fancy Jimmy Montague had not been idle. His first task was to superintend the placing of the cage—a long, narrow receptacle, constructed with an eye to the focal limitations of a camera lens. The inclosure was swung about so that the narrow front end of the cage, in which was the door, rested opposite the steep tier of bleacher seats upon which the audience was already seated.

A single bar at the back end of the cage was

then removed to permit the entrance of the camera. The lines of focus sweeping fanwise from the lens embraced the entire width of the receptacle at the front end, with the door as the exact center of the stage, and broadened out to embrace the audience as a background. Between the bleacher seats and the cage was an open space in which a certain portion of the action must transpire.

The completed picture, when flashed upon the screen, would present to the beholder an unobstructed foreground of the interior of the cage, beyond which the actors appeared against a solid wall of faces, the latter conveying the impression of a crowded circus tent.

"Now then!" said Jimmy Montague briskly, "all you people who are not in this first scene get back over the lines and keep still! Dennis, that means you. Beat it!"

"Remember about keeping your eye on him!" whispered Tommy as he faded away, and the girl nodded.

Tommy took up a position in the far corner of the studio, where for the first time he became conscious of the shabby raincoat. He removed it, deeply regretting that he had not done so sooner.

Into the space between the cage and the bleachers Montague summoned Miss Manners, La Rue and Tim Kelly, conversing with them in low, earnest tones. Tommy could not hear what the director was saying and, to tell the truth,

he was not interested in the action of scene fifty-one. He was already playing the hero in scene fifty-three, inventing a dozen methods of rescuing the beautiful lion tamer at risk of life and limb. He wondered if Jimmy Montague would order him to kiss her, and the one drop of bitterness in his cup was the thought that La Rue would probably do that.

"Now here's the action of the first scene," Jimmy was saying. "Myrtle, you're to go into the cage. This old lion is whip-shy. Pull the rawhide on him and he'll begin to act. He'll sit up on his haunches and growl, and make passes with his paws; but he's only bluffing."

" 'Tis what he always does when ye show him the whip," said Tim. "An' it ain't meanness wid him, miss—it's fear! He's been abused in his time an' he can't forget it. He'll git up on his hunkers an' show his teeth an' make an awful powwow; but, bless ye, he don't mean anything by it. So long as he can see the whip he'll keep on actin'—remember that."

"Good!" said Montague. "Now, Myrtle, as soon as the lion begins to work you register fear. Keep the whip in your hand where he can see it, and back away from him toward the side. Put one arm over your face—like this. Better crouch down against the bars and stay there till the end of the scene. The camera is cutting in the whole front end of the cage, so you won't have to worry about getting out of focus. Jack, when she kneels down by the

bars you come forward to the door of the cage and establish yourself. Then register great fear that the lion's turned bad. I want you to get that right square into the camera's eye. That's all; we cut there with an announcement: Dolores Loses Her Nerve—Love to the Rescue."

"Is that the end of the scene?" asked Miss Manners.

"Yes. Then you stand by, and Kelly will make the lion lay down and play dead—and the double will carry you out. Afterward I can make a closeup of La Rue grabbing a pistol out of my pocket, shooting through the bars and running. That'll come after the announcement—to establish that the lion was shot by La Rue. That's all, I guess—except that we won't rehearse this because the lion won't work more than once a day. We'll just go ahead and make the picture."

"You're sure about this lion, are you?" asked Miss Manners.

"Absolutely! Tim and the other animal man will be right outside the door and they could get you out in a flash. Oh, by the way, Tim, it would be a pretty good touch if you and George got a couple of those iron prods you had for the leopard and held 'em up as if you expected to use 'em. We want to make Duke look as ferocious as possible."

Tim Kelly grinned.

"Ye're slandherin' the poor old dog," said he; "but it'll look grand in a picture!"

Montague next turned his attention to the camera man. A producing director is responsible for everything, from the newest extra man to the high-salaried and capable expert who handles the camera.

"Oh, Charlie!"

"Yep!" answered Dupree, the little photographer.

"Got your focus nice and clear, so there won't be any fuzzy backgrounds in this? Camera all threaded up? And be sure you've got a full box there, because I'm going to make these two scenes together, all in one piece."

"Right-oh!" answered Dupree.

Montague turned to the bleachers:

"You extra people, sit still and don't act! And I'll fine anybody a day's pay that makes a noise. I want absolute quiet in this scene—remember!"

The director then became the heavy actor, twitched at the collar of his coat, straightened his tie and moved into position.

"All right, Tim! Wake up the star!"

VI

TOMMY DENNIS watched the animal man as he rattled the bars of the cage. Duke raised his head inquiringly.

"Up! Git up, Juke!" commanded Kelly, and

the big beast heaved himself erect with a sigh. He fixed his sleepy yellow eyes upon Tim's face with an expression of patient resignation plainer than words.

"I haven't the slightest idea what this is all about," said the yellow eyes, "but I am in the hands of my friends. Let's get it over with as soon as possible."

"Gee! He's a whopper when he stands up!" thought Tommy Dennis.

"Get him a little farther back from the door, Tim," whispered Montague. "That's better. . . . Hold up the iron prods, boys! . . . Now, then, Myrtle! Ready—action—go!"

Duke had often heard the three words that move the movie world. In his mind they were associated with unusual happenings and sudden developments. He pricked up his ears, for in the dead silence he could hear the ticking purr of the film as it sped past the lens into the takeup box; and turning slightly he caught the glint of the camera's eye at the far end of the cage.

Miss Manners stepped bravely forward, Tim Kelly threw open the door and Duke became aware that he had a visitor. Beyond a slight lifting of his head, Duke remained motionless, regarding this charming stranger with polite and respectful interest. To tell the truth, Duke was rather partial to women. He remembered that in his circus days they had never prodded him with canes or umbrellas, and he placed

that to their credit. Over in his corner Tommy Dennis drew a deep breath. It was a milkfed lion, after all!

"The whip! Show him the whip!"

Obedient to the whisper, Miss Manners drew the rawhide from a fold of her skirt and shook it under Duke's nose. Instantly the big brute rose upon his haunches, snarling and striking with his paws and filling the place with his angry protest.

"Ar-r-r-ugh! R-r-r-ugh!" scolded Duke, thinking of the swarthy man with the bad eye.

"Ye're doin' fine, Juke! Bully f'r you!" whispered Tim. "He's only bluffin', miss."

Tommy Dennis took a step forward, his knuckles whitening through the tan as his fingers closed convulsively.

"Don't lose your nerve!" he breathed. "Look him right in the eye!"

Even as the words were on his lips the transformation came. The girl wavered; the whip lowered uncertainly, and she turned slowly from the lion to the camera. Tommy read terror in the staring eyes—in the blind groping of the free hand—in the whole cringing attitude. He sensed panic in the sudden shifting of Montague and La Rue.

"She's afraid!" he groaned. "Why don't they do something?"

There was worse to come. Miss Manners crept toward the side of the cage, where she knelt cowering against the bars. Duke ceased

to growl, but he could still see the whip; and, like the dependable actor he was, he continued to register emotion. He squatted on the floor to await developments, and his tail whisked in swift, nervous circles.

"Swell!" whispered Jimmy Montague. "That crouch makes him look as if he was going to do a jump. Establish yourself, Jack!" Then it happened.

Charlie Dupree, counting his film foot by foot and congratulating himself upon an artistic success, caught a glimpse of a thunderbolt in pink-silk fleshings that shot into the picture from the void beyond the focal lines. Before Dupree could cry a warning, Jack La Rue, establishing himself at the cage door, was hurled violently to the ground, and high over the wild howls and imprecations of director and camera man rose a clarion call:

"It's all right! I'm coming!"

Being an animal man by instinct and training, Tim Kelly was geared up to meet emergencies rather more than halfway. As La Rue was doubled up by his double, Tim launched himself at Tommy's legs; but silk is slippery stuff, and not for nothing had Tommy been the star halfback of a football team. The flying tackle crumpled in a limp heap; Tommy snatched the iron bar from the petrified George, and the next instant he was inside the cage, brandishing the weapon.

Old Duke, still crouching, looked up just in

time to receive a terrific blow full upon the tip of his sensitive nose.

"You would, would you!" howled Tommy.

The king of beasts covered his afflicted head with his paws, tucked his tail between his legs and humped his back to the storm. His piteous clamor took on a shrill note of hysteria.

"Run, Miss Manners! I've got him going!"

The command fell on deaf ears. Myrtle had given one terrified glance over her shoulder and fainted, thereby blocking entrance to the cage for several seconds.

To the everlasting credit of Charlie Dupree let it be recorded here that his good right hand did not miss a single revolution of the crank.

"Hey! Keep him in the corner!" yelled Dupree. "Swing round more! You'll cloak the action!"

Tommy Dennis was beyond orders, however, and Duke was past remaining in any corner. There was only one idea left in the lion's battered head, and that was to tear down the bars and escape from this maniac who pursued him so relentlessly and hit him so hard. The cage rocked to Duke's frantic assaults, and at each thump of the iron bar his agonized cries grew louder. His wildly roving eye fell upon the gap that had been made to admit the end of the camera—and Duke leaped for it, plunging his nose into the aperture below the ticking black box. Charlie Dupree grew suddenly pale, but his right hand did not falter.

"Back!" he roared. "You're out of the picture! Back!"

Then Tommy Dennis, reeling and dizzy, exhausted by violent exercise and excess of emotion, added a finishing touch to a remarkable performance. He aimed his valedictory at the top of Duke's head, between the ears, putting into the blow the last remaining ounce of his strength. The heavy bar descended squarely upon the top of the camera, smashing the delicate mechanism into a thousand pieces; and Charlie Dupree, festooned with ruined film but faithful to the last, continued to turn the piece of crank that remained in his hand.

The next thing Tommy knew the iron bar was whisked from his grasp and he was plucked backward, going down underneath an avalanche of striking, swearing humanity. Five strong men sat upon various portions of his person, and the one astride his shoulders seized him by the ears and banged his head upon the floor of the cage. This was Director J. Montague.

Duke was whimpering in the far corner, his head in Tim Kelly's lap; and the animal man was weeping and cursing by turns.

"Kill him f'r me!" he raved. "The murderin' scut has fair slaughtered the best actor we got!"

Tommy Dennis was sullenly collecting his few personal effects when Buck Parvin burst into the dressing-room, out of breath and panting.

“What’s this I hear? What’s this? Tommy, they tell me you saved the lady, all right; but you saved her so strong that the whole gang had to tear into the cage to save the lion! What kind of a guy are you anyway? Just my fool luck to be down at the hawss corrals and miss a show like that! Did they can you for it?”

Tommy nodded. Then, after a silence:

“What do they say about it?”

“Well,” said Buck judiciously, “different people says different things. Now there’s Tim Kelly. I seen him before I come away from the farm. Tim says Duke won’t never get his tail out from between his legs if he lives to be older’n Methuselah, an’ that, as a movin’-picture lion, he’s through—loss o’ confidence, and all that stuff. I don’t know ’bout the confidence part of it; but, from what I seen, Duke sure is shy a lot of scalp, an’ he’s got a couple of front teeth that might’s well be on a watch-charm as where they are.”

“Darn it!” said Tommy. “I think they might have told me what the action was going to be!”

“Ye-ep, they might, at that,” said Buck; “but how could they figure you was goin’ to go for that lion the way you did? Then there’s Dupree, the photographer guy. I seen him cryin’ over what’s left of his tick-tick. He says he could forgive you for doublin’ La Rue at the wrong time, and he ain’t got no kick on what you done to the lion; but when you caved in

that box it looks like you lost a wellwisher. He 'lows as how he hadn't missed a move you made an' was gettin' a wonderful picture of you a-fannin' that ole snoozer on the bean, when—blooie! And there he was, kneedeep in busted glass and loose film. You'd better try not to meet that guy when you go out—he's hostile! Then there's Montague. Jimmy says you made a bum of the grandest scenario he ever wrote."

"Did anybody else say anything?"

"Well, yes," said Buck. "Myrtle—she was kind of mentionin' you in spots—a little."

"What did she say?"

"I heard her tellin' La Rue that you'd spoiled the best piece of actin' she'd ever done, an' then beat up the lion so horrible they couldn't never get no makeover on it. What made her sorest was that you'd been ribbin' her up to keep her nerve an' then you went an' lost yours!"

"Me?" demanded Tommy. "Lost my nerve—after what I did to that lion!"

"That's what the lady said," remarked Buck, rolling a brown-paper cigarette. "The way she figures it out, you got scared and went kind of daffy!"

There was a silence of two full minutes while Tommy crammed his belongings into his suitcase.

"That does settle it!" he said bitterly. "And I thought I was risking my life—for that!"

Buck Parvin peered at the boy through the

smoke as it rose from his nostrils. When he spoke there was something almost like sympathetic understanding in his tone.

“Son,” he said, “Uncle Buck—he knows how you feel. He tried to do a lady a favor once by beatin’ up her husband when he had a beatin’ coming. Spanish lady she was—down in the Pecos country. Ever seen that scar across my ribs? . . . That’s the thanks I got! . . . Women an’ lions—lions an’ women—look out for ’em, Tommy! Both of ’em scratch!”

THE INTERNATIONAL CUP

DAVID SELIGMAN, the vice-president of the Titan Company, with offices on Fifth Avenue, studios in Chicago and Los Angeles, and films at work the wide world over, was more of a sport than a sportsman.

His knowledge of athletics was confined to baseball, as witnessed from a box at the Polo Grounds on a warm Saturday afternoon. What he knew about the national game would not have filled a volume; but what he knew about all other sports and pastimes might have been written in a large round hand upon the back of a postage stamp. Still his reading of the daily papers included a casual survey of the sporting pages; for said he:

“You never know when an idea for a picture is going to hit you or where it is going to come from.”

In proof of this statement he laid down his paper one morning and fired a question at his secretary, Marco Lazarus.

“This polo thing—what is it?”

"Polo?" said Marco. "That's a game, Mr. Seligman."

"Sure it's a game! I didn't think it was a business. What I want to know is this: How do they play it?"

"With horses," said Marco, "and long-handled hammers, and a white ball. Once I saw it out at Van Cortlandt Park; and, believe me, there was fine action to it."

"Horses!" said Seligman. "That's right in our line. Send a wire to Montague that he must make a polo picture at once. With all these English lords and dukes coming here next month to play for a cup, and the papers full of it already, everybody is going to be interested in polo. It's new stuff too. A good picture ought to make a mint of money. Tell Montague to rush it!"

"Cert'nly," said Lazarus; "but what if Montague can't get any big league polo players in Los Angeles? You know how hard it is to get anything in them small Western towns, Mr. Seligman. Maybe they don't know what polo is out there."

"A man who lives in Yonkers should know about California!" grunted Dave with withering sarcasm. "Take a trip sometime and go West until you wet your feet in the Pacific Ocean, and everywhere you find skyscrapers and apartment houses, and electric lights and turkey-trotting. And even if Jimmy Montague was sitting on a deserted island in the mid-

dle of Salt Lake he would get us what we want. If the fellow falls down on the real stuff he sends us a fake so much better than the original that there is no comparison at all. Wire him at once!"

Jimmy Montague, producing director for the Titan Company and maker of miracles to order, bit hard upon his stubby cigar as he read that telegram.

"Here's a hot one!" said he to Sam Packard, the purchasing agent. "Seligman wants a polo picture and he wants it quick! Now who ever told him there was such a game as that in the world? 'To take advantage of interest in international cup series,' is what he says. Confound Dave! I wish he'd let me alone. Here I'm giving him a picture a week regular as clockwork, and I've got my plans made a month ahead. Next week I wanted to do some water stuff over at Catalina, and here comes this fool telegram—and I have to drop everything. A polo picture! Have we got a polo expert round here?"

"Not that I know of," said Packard. "I tried to stick through one polo match, but it outgamed me. When they began to serve afternoon tea I beat it. Imagine stopping a fellow in the middle of a hot mixup to ask him whether he'd have lemon or cream in his oolong!"

"That's the very thing that is going to make this a tough stunt to get away with," said Montague. "We've got to have the afternoon-tea

atmosphere to this picture or it won't get by with the people who know. Polo is a rich man's game—an Englishman's game—and I don't see how we can get any of the real people to fall for us! Our cowpunchers can ride all right enough, but they'd look awful bad in a tea-drinking scene, and they haven't got the right kind of horses either. I know just the sort of men I want, but how the deuce am I going to get 'em? Gee! I wish Dave Seligman would go to Europe again and the boats would quit running for about a year! Every time he horns in with one of his royal commands there's trouble. He put the curse on the jungle stuff, and what happened? Old Duke, the lion, got such a flailing he won't ever be any good in a picture again—and we lost a new camera. I wonder if Ben Leslie knows anything about polo? I'll ask him."

Ben Leslie was the property man—a person of few words and many amazing experiences, each one of which had taught him something worth remembering. He appeared, thoughtfully chewing fine-cut tobacco—an expression of settled melancholy upon his thin features.

"Say, Ben, do you know anything about polo?" asked Montague.

"That horseback croquet?" Leslie shook his head. "I should hope not! Ask Buck Parvin. He claims he invented it."

"I knew I'd get some sort of a tip from Ben," said Montague. "He knows everything

in the world—that fellow! Where’s Buck?”

Buck was discovered in the extra men’s dressing-room at work on a new hatband, an intensely patriotic affair, heavy with red, white and blue beads. Parvin was expecting to work in a Western picture; consequently he was attired in full regalia—angora chaps, spurs, leather vest, and a remarkable collection of cheap silver ornaments. A quirt gay with bead-work hung from his wrist as he jingled into the director’s office.

“Welcome, little one!” said Montague. “They tell me you know something about polo.”

“Whoever told you that sure spoke a mouthful for once,” said Buck modestly. “I reckon I ought to know something about polo! Why, say, man—me and old Butch DeVries wrote the game!”

“Quit kidding!” said Montague. “I want to know.”

“And I’m telling you,” said Buck. “Polo? Didn’t I have a job down on the DeVries Ranch, at Saspameco, trainin’ polo ponies for the New York market? And didn’t our bunch go over to the fort at San Antone and whale the everlasting socks off the best cavalry team in the country? No—I reckon I just fell asleep and dreamed that! You ask them cavalry people if Buck Parvin knows anything about polo. They’ll tell you it’s my middle name. Why, look here, Jim—I can do stuff with them wooden balls that ain’t possible nohow! I can——”

“Yes, yes!” said Montague. “I’ll take your word for it. We want to make a polo picture in a hurry. Can you get the stuff?”

“All but the players,” said Buck. “Them Pasadena stables are chock-full of brokendown polo ponies; they rent ’em to tourists for saddle animals. They look all right, but they can’t play polo no more—knees busted up mostly. Then we’ve got to have some of them flat saddles—English postage stamps I call ’em. I know where I can land a few. Gimme five big iron dollars to oil up a friend of mine what works at the Polo Club and he’ll come through with pith helmets, mallets and balls for further orders. Gimme ten and I’ll make him borrow some boots for us.”

“Nothing could be fairer than that,” said Montague. “We can fake up something that’ll look like a game.”

“Don’t kid yourself,” said Buck. “You can’t fake polo strong enough to fool anybody that ever saw the real game. Believe me, the worst-looking thing in the world is a guy tryin’ to fourflush on one of them flat English saddles. You can’t get by with a fake, Jim; you got to have a few players. Now, what you ought to do is to hire some of them skinny Englishmen. They not only play the game to beat the band but, doggone ’em, they look it! There’s something about a lean, blond boy with a loose chin and buck teeth that sort of reminds me of polo

—just like a dago makes me think of a hand-organ.”

“Holy cat!” ejaculated Montague. “If I could only pick up a typical Englishman or two I could put this picture across and call it ‘The International Cup.’ I wonder if we could get a few of ’em to stand for a movie stunt? Do you know any, Buck?”

“Not no more, I don’t. We had one down to the ranch at Saspamco. I sailed in to lick him once for saying that George Washington wasn’t so much and that the best he ought to had was a draw. If those old time Englishmen that come over here to rough-house us for puttin’ salt water in their tea could fight like the bird I tangled up with, my hat is off to George—that’s all! He must have been there forty ways from the middle of the deck! Yes, sir; ole Cuthbert sure taught me to appreciate history.”

Montague paused for reflection.

“Any polo games coming off round here soon?” he asked.

“Not till next month,” said Buck. “The Kanakas are going to play here then.”

“Can’t wait that long,” said Jimmy. “I was thinking we could get permission to put a camera on the field and use the pictures of a real match for cut-ins. We’ll have to do the best we can with cowpunchers. If I could only land an Englishman or two! One typical London Johnny would help a lot.”

“Why not advertise?” suggested Packard. “You might pick up a remittance man. Those younger sons are always broke.”

“And proud as Lucifer!” said Montague. “Still, we might try it, though. You never can tell. I’ll stick an ad in the morning papers, giving the street address. If you’d say ‘moving pictures’ to an Englishman he’d drop dead!”

“Lovely billiards!” said Buck. “I hope you get enough for a mess. And lemme give you a million dollars’ worth of advice for nothing: If you should happen to gaff a sure-enough Englishman don’t go braggin’ to him about what a great fighter George Washington was. That’s how I come to get showed up that time. Just let George stand pat on the record book. Why, say, that crazy Cuthbert galoot made me stand up in the bunkhouse with nothing on me but a shirt and sing God Save the King! to the tune of My Country, ’Tis of Thee. And if that ain’t rubbing it in I don’t know what is. Then he made me save the whole royal family—one at a time—with a sawed-off shotgun. You listen to your Uncle Buck! Some of them Englishmen are so plumb ignorant and bigoted that they don’t give a damn whether the Revolutionary War is over yet or not.”

II

MR. KENNETH CLIFFORD DEVENHAM sat on the edge of the bed in his lilac-silk pajamas and made a mental inventory of his possessions, beginning with the flat pocketbook on the table and ending with the fat wardrobe trunk in the corner. Somewhere between the two he arrived at the conclusion that he was facing a grave crisis in his temporal affairs.

“Silly ass—to spend all that money at the Grand Cañon!” said Kenneth Clifford to himself. “Now I presume I shall have to go to work—or something of the sort. It won’t be for long, of course; and I dare say I shall find it interesting—as an experience.”

Having settled the matter in his own mind, the young man rose, treated himself to a refreshing cold shower and dressed with scrupulous care. He was fortunate in possessing youth, optimism, a sunny disposition and a good appetite. These assets were untouched by temporary financial disaster, and he was not particularly dismayed by the thought that, for a time, he must depend upon his own resources. This was California, was it not—the land of opportunity?

True, the money that should have lasted for six months had vanished in four, but Kenneth Clifford had enjoyed every day of the vanished

period. He had met many charming people in America and had done his best to repay hospitality in kind. The money had taken wings, but it had fluttered gloriously before flying away.

It was also true that he might have sent an urgent cablegram to Battersby, his solicitor; but there were several reasons why it was best that Battersby should know nothing of his predicament. The memory of Kenneth Clifford's last interview with that excellent old gentleman was still green. He recalled it now in painful detail.

"Remember, Mr. Devenham," Battersby had said, "it was your father's express wish that his estate should be so administered that the disbursing periods occur semi-annually. His orders were definite—I might almost say positive—that under no circumstances should they be shortened. Under no circumstances! I believe it was his idea that these extended periods would teach you to live within your means."

Battersby had looked searchingly at Kenneth Clifford; and the young man, flushing slightly, had replied to the effect that the "guv'nor" had always entertained an entirely erroneous opinion as to his business capacity.

"You shall see," he had remarked with a somewhat lordly air, "that these—er—precautions are quite unnecessary. Quite! I have no intention of making an ass of myself and going beyond my means. I shall get on very com-

fortably under the present arrangement, I assure you."

"Comfortably is not the word!" Battersby had squeaked. "Luxuriously, my dear sir—luxuriously! The amount you are to receive in a lump sum twice a year is more than ample for one without incumbrances of any sort. I sincerely trust you may find it so."

"You may have no fear." Kenneth Clifford had said this in his most positive manner, striking the floor smartly with his stick to show how much he meant it.

"How long do you expect to remain in America?"

"That I cannot say," the young man had answered. "Possibly I may never return to England at all; in fact, I think it is quite likely. I may marry in the States and grow up with the country—and—and all that sort of thing, you know."

"That would be a pity!" Battersby had said. "A very great pity!"

Kenneth Clifford had thought so himself and, what was more, had devoutly hoped that Alice Burwell might think so, too, seeing that the hardness of that young woman's heart was driving him to lands afar.

The statement to his solicitor as to matrimonial probabilities did not quite coincide with one he had made the night before, when he had asked a certain young woman a certain question

for the ninth time in six months, and had received a certain answer.

"I shall go away," Kenneth Clifford had murmured in broken tones—for at least he had done his best to break them—"I shall go away and not annoy you any more. India or South Africa or the States—somewhere. You will never see me again, Alice. Never!" Then, as the lady had not urged him to reconsider when the cue had been so plainly given, he had added rather hastily: "Unless, of course, you change your mind. One word, dear, and I'll catch the first boat. . . . No; I shall not write. Too much like—er—prolonging the agony. Old Battersby will know my address; I shall keep in touch with him wherever I am. Would you mind if I kissed you just once—for good-by? I beg your pardon! I suppose I should have known better. I thought—but it really doesn't matter what I thought, does it? Quite right! Don't forget, Alice, that Battersby will know where I am, and one word from you—eh? I assure you, on my honor, that I am quite serious! This time it is really good-by."

Kenneth Clifford thought of all these things as he got into his clothes. In a way it was a bit unfortunate, he reflected, that he had gone so strong with Battersby as to future intentions; but having committed himself there remained nothing but to "play the game," as he would have expressed it.

If pride had been unable to stay his hand

from the cablegram blank there was another and more powerful incentive to take his medicine in becoming silence. Battersby was also Miss Burwell's solicitor, and Kenneth Clifford had reason to believe that the old gentleman regarded Alice with a fatherly eye. What if he should so far sink the professional in the paternal as to mention the fact that young Devenham—silly goat!—had squandered two thousand pounds in four months? Kenneth Clifford shuddered at the thought. He happened to be well acquainted with Miss Burwell's views on wasters.

Battersby, then, besides being the disbursing agent, was the last line of communication left open between the young man and the object of what he was sadly pleased to term a hopeless but undying affection. Battersby might even become a friend at court—and Kenneth Clifford knew that he stood in sore need of one.

Certainly there was nothing about the young man's manner of ordering breakfast that suggested mental strain.

"Melon, pot of coffee, rolls, rasher of bacon, three soft-boiled eggs. Oh, I say, waiter! If you were out of a situation what would you do?"

The waiter was Irish and therefore equal to emergencies.

"I should go down to union headquarters, sir."

"Ah!" Then, after a pause: "Quite so. But if there were no union headquarters?"

"In that case, sir," said the intelligent waiter, "I think I should buy a morning paper and look in the Male Help Wanted columns, sir."

"Yes, of course—of course!" said Kenneth Clifford. "I should never have thought of that."

An hour later, newspaper in hand, he approached the desk clerk, his manner a mixture of surprise and mild indignation.

"I say, look here!" said Kenneth Clifford. "Do you really mean to tell me that you have professional polo teams in this country? Upon my word, I never heard of such a thing!"

"Neither did I," said the clerk; "but it's getting so now in this country that everybody's out for the dough. Professional polo? I don't believe it's played round here."

"Read this!" said Kenneth Clifford accusingly. He spread the paper on the desk and indicated a paragraph.

WANTED—Polo players; Englishmen preferred. Good money to right parties. Apply to J. Montague, 1525 B—— Avenue, City. 9 a. m. to 4 p. m.

"Well, what do you know about that!" ejaculated the clerk.

"My dear fellow," expostulated Kenneth

Clifford, "I know nothing about it, else I should not have troubled you. Professional polo! It's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of in my life! Most extraordinary!"

"Why don't you look into it?" suggested the clerk, who was used to providing entertainment for world-worn tourists.

"I shall—this very day. Call me a taxi!"

III

"SAY, Jim! There's a fellow in the front office who looks like seven million dollars! He came out in one of them multiplication tables on wheels, and it's waiting for him. He wants to see you, but he won't say what for."

"Send him in!" said Montague, interrupted in the middle of his polo scenario.

Jimmy Montague had a wonderfully quick eye for detail, as every successful director must have. Even as his thumb-nail grated inquiringly over the engraved surface of the card, his trained eye appraised the visitor from the top of his sleek, blond head to the soles of his heavy shoes. "What a type!" he thought. "Oh, what a comedy type!" But aloud he said:

"What can I do for you, Mr.—Devenham?"

"You can give me work, I hope," was the totally unexpected response. Kenneth Clifford, with British bluntness, had gone straight to the heart of the matter.

Even then Jimmy Montague failed to comprehend the situation. He was temporarily dazed by an atmosphere of money, taste—and something else he would have characterized as “heaps of class.” Extra men seldom call in taxicabs.

“Work?” said Jimmy. “Are—are you an actor?”

“Eh? I beg pardon. An actor, did you say?”

“Yes. Can you act? Have you had any experience?”

Kenneth Clifford blinked his pale blue eyes and stared vacantly.

“Oh, I say!” he remonstrated. “I’m dashed if I see what acting has to do with it—I am, really! I’ve done a bit in the way of amateur theatricals and all that sort of thing—every fellow has, you know—but, hang it all, what has acting to do with polo?”

Jimmy Montague took his turn at staring.

“Are you a polo player?” he demanded.

“I am,” said Kenneth Clifford. “That is what I came to see you about.”

Jimmy Montague leaned back in his chair and roared. Kenneth Clifford rose rather stiffly.

“You will pardon me,” he said. “If this is an American joke——”

“Hold on!” said Montague hastily. “Don’t go away mad! Sit down! I want to talk with you.” Kenneth Clifford seated himself on the extreme edge of a chair and regarded Montague steadily. “Now, then,” said the director,

"do you know what sort of a place this is?"

The young man shook his head. Politeness kept him from expressing the opinion that it was a private madhouse.

"It's a moving-picture studio," said Montague.

"Oh, I say!" cried Kenneth Clifford. "Is it—really? Where they make the films—eh? I've never seen one before!"

He looked about him with wide-eyed interest.

"Yes, this is where we make the films. And if it's work you're after, you're engaged now."

"Look here," said Kenneth Clifford, "how do you know I'd suit?"

"You'll suit, all right!" said Montague with a grin. "And if you'll only be natural in front of a camera you can't help being a tremendous hit."

Kenneth Clifford bent his cane across his knee and rocked back and forth, laughing until the tears came into his eyes.

"This is ripping!" he gasped at last. "I came here to play polo and now I'm an actor! Haw! Haw! Haw! You do things so fast in this country!"

"We have to in this business," said Jimmy Montague. "You'll have a chance to play polo too. We're going to make a polo picture, and you're exactly the type I've been looking for. I'd have picked you out of a thousand men. How are you fixed for riding clothes?"

"Fixed?" said Kenneth Clifford. "I have them—if that is what you mean."

"Bully!" said Montague. "Got a frock coat and a silk hat?"

"Of—course!" said Kenneth Clifford, feeling very much as if he had been asked whether he owned a change of underwear.

"Move all your junk out to the Marchmont Hotel, in Pasadena," said Jimmy. "Most of the pictures will have to be made out there—the polo scenes and the high-society stuff, you know. We pay all expenses. You'll get five dollars a day clear. How does that strike you?"

"That will do very nicely."

"It's rather more than we pay extra men, as a rule," said the director; "but I'm going to write you a part in this picture. It'll give you a chance to show what you can do."

"That's very kind, I'm sure," said the young man—and he took his whirling brain out into the open air.

"What a lark!" he chuckled. "A moving-picture actor! This is an experience! I wonder what I shall look like in the films?"

This last point was one upon which Jimmy Montague had no doubts.

"Oh, that face!" said the director as he tore a half-finished scenario into bits. "A typical bloody, bloomin' Britisher, don't ye know! You couldn't mistake him for anything else. Write him a part? He's going to be the whole bally-show!"

Whereupon Mr. James Montague set about writing a moving-picture drama round his one Heaven-sent Englishman—just as he would have written a scenario round a giraffe or a hippopotamus, or any other queer creature at the animal farm. Canned drama to order was Jimmy Montague's specialty, and he knew his business.

IV

ALL went well with "The International Cup."

The manager of the Marchmont Hotel, scenting advertising from afar and esteeming publicity no less than his right eye, was more than willing that porches and lawns should serve as locations for the high-society stuff; and many of the guests entered into the affair so thoroughly that Charlie Dupree complained aloud.

"Never saw so many goats in my life!" said the camera man. "Soon as they see me turn the crank they want to run and get in the picture, and wave their hands and holler: 'Oh, you!' They must think this is a joke and film doesn't cost anything."

Buck's friend at the Polo Club inclined his ear to reason and disgorged pith helmets, mallets with warped handles, chipped balls and second-hand boots.

The club members themselves—when it was

pointed out to them that a moving picture would bring Southern California polo prominently before the eyes of the world—saw no reason why they should refuse the use of the clubhouse and playing field to such a suave gentleman as Mr. Montague.

Buck Parvin collected a noble aggregation of dickey-legged ponies, which looked all the polo they were no longer able to play; and, to Jimmy Montague's great joy, Buck also unearthed three English grooms. When incased in riding breeches, tan boots, silk shirts and pith helmets they came near resembling the real thing—and, with Kenneth Clifford, they were to represent Old England before the camera; while Buck Parvin and three cowpuncher friends were to bear the Stars and Stripes gallantly through countless feet of film.

"It won't be so awfully rotten," said Montague to Buck judicially as he watched Kenneth Clifford Devenham twisting a wiry little red pony in and out between the goal posts, back of which Charlie Dupree was at work focusing his camera.

"Huh!" said Buck, whose bowlegs were painfully apparent in English riding breeches. "It won't be rotten at all. If the ponies don't play out on us we ought to get some darned good action stuff. Take Lord Algy over there—he sure is some polo player! The flunkies ain't so worse when you take a quick flash at 'em, and my boys have been workin' out on them postage

stamps for three days. They'll get by all right, but a flat English saddle gets a cowpuncher's goat at first. That Lord Algy—say, he's the pure quill in Englishmen, ain't he? Yes, sir—the clear catnip! You won't make any mistake if you shove that mug of his right up against the camera—they won't take him for no Swede—I tell you those, Jim! Now you know what I meant when I said some Englishmen remind me of polo. He's one."

"Yes; he's the type," said Montague. "Did you see him make that backhanded swipe a while ago? Caught the ball right in the air!"

"Oh, he savvies what side of a hawss to get on at!" said Buck. "And he sure does recognize a polo pony when he sees one. Them grooms—they was all for pickin' out the good-lookers; but Algy, he nosed through the bunch, tried out a few, and then froze to that homely little red runt—the best polo pony in the string. That's Brandy—used to belong to a rich guy down at Riverside. If we knew as much polo as that little red trick, we could write a book about it. . . . You know, Jim, I kind of like that Englishman! He's so darned wide open and simple, and talks right off his chest. I was askin' him a few questions just to feel him out. He says he started in to buy the Grand Cañon on the instalment plan, but there was too much of it and his dough petered. That's why he's working. Didn't make no bones about it at all and takes the whole thing as a joke.

Yes, sir; he's all right! I reckon he knows the war is over. How was he in that high-society stuff over at the hotel this morning? Did he deliver?"

"Right square in the camera's eye," said Montague enthusiastically. "Fell into it as if he hadn't done anything else all his life. When it comes to wearing clothes as if they'd been made for him, and doing the little social stunts, he makes the rest of us look like a lot of hack-drivers dressed up."

"Shucks!" said Parvin. "There's a lot in the way you're raised. Now me—I never even seen one of them claw-hammer coats till I was risin' nineteen; and the first one I ever had on my back was when you made me work in that poker scene. I was scairt stiff for fear the darn thing was goin' to come undone somewheres. It sort of made me feel that I had to begin to act and be genteel, and stick my little finger out when I took a drink; but Lord Algy—say, it wouldn't surprise me if he's been dressed up so often that he don't mind it at all! It's come to be second nature with him."

"He's a bully find!" said Montague. "If he sticks long enough I'll have him in a lot of pictures. We could do some Western stuff, with him as the tenderfoot—have him ride a buckner, and all that sort of thing. . . . Buck, how do you score in this fool game?"

"You lam the ball through between the

posts!" said Parvin. "Who's got to win, Jim—or does the dope call for a winner?"

"English team wins," said Montague.

"I like your crust," grunted Buck. "I reckon you don't know what an elegant trimming them hands across the sea got the last time they was over here. What's the idea? Algy wins and cops out the swell heiress?"

"Something like that," said the director-author. "He wins Myrtle."

"Why don't you let me win Myrtle once in a while?" demanded Buck. "Fix up a love scene that'll let me hold that leadin' lady's hand for about a thousand feet and you won't have to gimme no dough for it! . . . All right! Pay off on Lord Algy! Put them English flags up on the goal posts, and me and the rest of the American citizens will crowd in and wallop a few hot ones for Algy to stop. That shows him defending the English goal—see? Then we'll stick up the American flags, and Algy and the noble grooms can shoot a few goals through me. That shows 'em winning. I reckon I better whang a few in there myself to make it look like a close game, and don't forget to tell them boneheaded extry people in the automobiles to wave the right flags and yell every time the ball goes between the posts. How about me faking a fall?"

"Go to it!" said Montague. "Only don't forget that Algy is the star. You always were a frightful film-cannibal, Buck."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Parvin. "I ain't got much on you when it comes to bein' a foot-age-hog. I've seen you eat up sixty or seventy feet just to die in—many's the time."

"But I play the heavies, and the villain always dies hard," grinned Montague.

"Yes; and you write the pieces too," said Buck. "I notice these scenario writer-actors don't take none the worst of it."

"All right, Charlie!" said the director, moving over behind the camera. "I want both the goal posts in."

"You've got 'em," said the camera man.

"Buck, get on a pony and stand there between the posts!" ordered Montague. "We want to get the horse-height. And don't cut any higher over his head than you have to, Charlie. I don't want too much sky in this picture."

Thanks to Buck's vociferous coaching and Kenneth Clifford's clean, sweeping strokes, the polo scenes passed off successfully.

Buck, who would not be cheated out of his specialty, improvised a thrilling bit in which he raced straight at the camera, Kenneth Clifford in pursuit, with orders to turn the ball at the last instant if possible. Just as Devenham thundered alongside, Buck pitched clear out of the saddle; and Kenneth Clifford capped the climax with a slashing backhand stroke, executed so close to the camera that Charlie Dupree heard the swish of the mallet as it de-

scended. Even the blasé Jimmy Montague yelled at this hair-raising bit of action; but, as soon as the camera man ceased to turn, Kenneth Clifford was out of his saddle and bending over the prostrate Buck.

"Charlie, get some of that quick!" cried Montague. "It ain't in the scene, but it's great stuff!"

"My dear fellow!" said Kenneth Clifford. "That was a nasty tumble! I hope you're not hurt?"

Up to this time Buck, with true dramatic instinct, had not moved a muscle. As he felt Kenneth Clifford's arm about him he sat up and spat out a mouthful of dirt.

"Hurt!" he said. "It's worse than that. Here I go and pull one of the swellest falls of my life and you swing in across me and cloak the action. We got to do it over again, Algy; and, for the love of Mike, gimme a chance to register that fall on the film! Let the camera see me do it!"

At last everyone was satisfied, including Buck, who got his fall in; and Montague assembled the entire company and the extra people for the final scene on the polo field.

Miss Myrtle Manners, the leading woman, very lovely in a trim-fitting afternoon gown and a picture hat, left the high-wheeled trap in which she had been sitting and approached the sidelines.

"Now, then," said Montague, "here's the

blowoff. This is supposed to take place at the end of the game. Devenham, what's the customary thing to do just at the finish?"

Kenneth Clifford blinked.

"Why," said he, "everyone has a brandy and soda."

"Good idea!" said Montague. "I don't know whether the censors will stand for that, but we'll try to put it over on 'em. But what do they do on the field?"

"Oh!" said Kenneth Clifford. "The losers cheer the winners—swing their mallets, and all that sort of thing. Then the winners cheer and everybody shakes hands."

"That's what I want!" said Montague. "Now here's the action: Myrtle, you stand here on the sidelines. The players will bunch up on the field and cheer. When they do that, Myrtle, you register joy and pride. Then, Devenham, you break away from the bunch and ride over here as fast as you can. See this little piece of paper on the ground? That's where you dismount. Then you cross over this way, toward the camera, and take Miss Manners in your arms——"

"Oh, I say!" expostulated Kenneth Clifford. "It's not done on the polo field—that sort of thing! Really, it isn't!"

"It is in this case," said Montague. "You're supposed to be in love with this lady and she's supposed to be in love with you."

"Oh, I say!" murmured Kenneth Clifford again, staring at Miss Manners.

"That's the action," said Montague. "Better rehearse it a few times. . . . Not at all like it!" said the director after the first attempt. "You're too stiff, Devenham! Watch me once!"

Montague embraced the lady fervently, much to Kenneth Clifford's amazement; but he profited by the lesson, and after the third rehearsal the director signaled the camera man to make the picture.

"Say, Jimmy," said Miss Manners, "don't you think it would be better if he kissed me? That would be the natural thing to do, you know."

Kenneth Clifford gasped.

"Sure!" said Montague. "As soon as you put your arms round her, Devenham, kiss her—and don't cloak the action when you do it."

"Do I really kiss her—or just make believe?" asked Kenneth Clifford. "It seems such a cheeky thing to do—rather."

"Use your own judgment," said Buck. "If it was me I'd give that lady a real good smack and take a chance on a bawl-out afterward. Jimmy Montague, he always kisses her on the square when he's workin' in a love scene with her; but then—Jim's the director."

"Ah!" said Kenneth Clifford.

"Ready—Action—Go!" shouted the director. Kenneth Clifford did not kiss the beautiful

leading lady, though he was sorely tempted to do so. It would have taken a film expert to tell the difference, however; and as his lips grazed hers he murmured something that caused the young woman to hide her face upon his shoulder to cloak a smile.

“Only fancy, Miss Manners!” he whispered. “They actually pay me a pound a day—for this! I should pay them—really!”

V

THE first time Alice Burwell refused to marry Kenneth Clifford she was convinced that she meant her “No” to be final. The second time she was not quite so sure; and the other seven times she refused him purely from habit.

Kenneth Clifford’s broken good-by did not move the lady to any great extent. That also had become a habit. Beginning with the fourth refusal, he had not once failed to conclude the ceremony with a touching little speech of farewell, always with the same little quiver in his voice. On one occasion he had been quite certain he was going to India to be eaten by tigers; again it had been Johannesburg; and the third time he favored New Zealand. After the eighth refusal he purchased a ticket to Paris. These things being so, Miss Burwell was the least little bit indignant when she learned that Kenneth Clifford had really sailed for America.

She waited confidently for a letter, but no such missive arrived. At the end of two months Miss Burwell's surprise was entirely swallowed up in indignation.

Still, if he did not care to write she would never be the one to break the silence. Having satisfied herself upon this point, Miss Burwell called upon Battersby—on business, of course—and Kenneth Clifford's name was mentioned, quite by accident.

"Yes," said the solicitor; "I hear from him regularly. His latest plan is to buy a ranch in the Rocky Mountains near Chicago. He says America is a vast country and the people are most charming."

"Indeed!" said the young woman. "He will remain abroad indefinitely then?"

"So he leads me to believe," remarked Battersby. "It seems a pity, my dear."

"Not at all," said Miss Burwell. "He is old enough to know his own mind; and if he prefers America to England——"

After she had gone Battersby shook his gray head and sighed.

At the end of five months Miss Burwell went to London to visit her aunt. She had reached a state of mind bordering on acute exasperation. Fortunately for London, the young woman was not in the least interested in the Militant Suffrage movement, else had she become what our harassed English cousins term a Bashibazoukess—a lady with a hammer in

one hand and a suitcase full of petrol in the other. Alice Burwell was ripe for window-smashing and fiery demonstrations. One may refuse a young man often enough to form the habit, but it is most exasperating to have that young man calmly accept the habit as incurable. The best thing about our habits is the firm belief that we can break ourselves of them at any time.

In London Alice met many young men, some of whom were bright, some stupid, some timid and some overbold. None pleased her; but this would have been hard to guess by her feverish gayety when in company. When alone she played the piano softly in the twilight and sang old songs in an indifferent contralto voice.

One afternoon Miss Burwell slipped into a moving-picture theater. She did not like moving pictures, for they usually made her head ache; but the posters outside depicted the hazards and hardships of life in the Wild West, and she was interested in the subject.

The picture flickering upon the screen was a disappointment. Instead of cowboys and Indians she saw men in pith helmets and white riding breeches careening furiously about a polo field. She closed her eyes to wait for the Indians.

“Look sharp there! He’ll ride you down!”

A voice spoke behind her in accents of warning, and Alice opened her eyes. Two players swept into the foreground—one slightly in ad-

vance, the other in pursuit. There was a collision; the first rider pitched out of his saddle, and through the dust haze a single figure came dashing, mallet flung aloft. Alice Burwell saw nothing but the face of the rider, life-size upon the canvas, and seemingly so close that she might have touched it by stretching out her hand. There was no mistaking a single feature of that honest and not too handsome countenance. She recognized it at once—would have recognized it anywhere. The man on the polo pony was none other than the recreant Kenneth Clifford. Miss Burwell's fingers closed convulsively upon the handle of her parasol; and if all the truth must be told she made a noise like a startled hen.

The picture disappeared and in its place was an announcement—Love Triumphant.

Again Kenneth Clifford came riding straight into the picture. She saw him fling himself from his pony and leap forward eagerly—and then, and not till then, she saw the girl. With the smile she knew so well, Kenneth Clifford took the stranger in his arms and—yes—he kissed her! Kissed her with all those people looking on! Shame! Before the girl hid her face upon Kenneth Clifford's shoulder there was ample time to see that she was very, very beautiful.

That was enough for Miss Burwell. She left the theater and went for a long walk.

The next afternoon she dodged a bridge

party and went back to the moving-picture theater. This time she saw the entire film—Kenneth Clifford arriving at the hotel in a smart trap; Kenneth Clifford escorting the lovely stranger over the lawn; Kenneth Clifford in an earnest tête-à-tête upon the veranda—oh, if she only understood lip-reading! Kenneth Clifford drinking tea, which she knew he loathed and had always refused at her hands! Again she saw him flashing about the polo field—again she saw him ride toward the sidelines; but this time she was watching the girl. What sort of woman was it who would actually return a kiss before such a cloud of witnesses?

One of the theater attachés was an obliging youth, who answered as many of her questions as he could.

“Carn’t say, miss; but she’s some American actress. . . . Yes, miss; they ’ave regular companies, same as in the theaters. We recognize the faces from seein’ ’em so frequentlike. . . . ’Im? A new one, miss. . . . Clever actor, ain’t ’e? Somewheres in the States. . . . Titan Company is wot they calls it. . . . Thank you, miss!”

Alice went straight to the nearest telegraph office, where she addressed a brief message to Hubert Battersby, Solicitor.

VI

"WHY, listen to reason, Algy!" argued Buck. "What do you want to blow the job for? Extry man a couple of months ago, an' now you're playin' a line of special leads while La Rue is on his vacation. Seventy-five a week! Pretty soft—if you ask me! What do you want, anyway?"

They were sitting outside the studio at the Titan headquarters, dressed in the regulation Western garb as it is seen in the movies. Jimmy Montague was putting the finishing touches on a work of art entitled "My Lord the Tenderfoot," with Kenneth Clifford in the name part.

He had been tossed in a blanket by hilarious cowpunchers, dumped into a creek, thrown off a bucking broncho, and treed by Jeff, the tame bear from the animal farm. He had rescued the ranchman's daughter from drowning, saved the property from foreclosure, foiled the wicked foreman, and had but one more scene to play, in which he was to win the lovely Myrtle Manners for the seventh time since he had been an actor. Jimmy Montague was not the man to waste a perfect type when he had one.

"What do you want to quit for, Algy?" persisted Buck. "Feet itchin' to be travelin' again, or what?"

"My dear fellow," said Kenneth Clifford,

"I've had a charming experience. I shall never forget it—really; but the truth of the matter is, I've a bit of money coming, which should be here to-morrow. It's from my father's estate—a matter of four thousand a year."

Buck whistled.

"Four—thousand—dollars!" said he reverently. "No wonder you want to quit! If I had four thousand cents I'd quit with you."

"Not dollars, Buck—pounds, old fellow—pounds!"

Parvin's chin sagged and his tobacco sack slipped from his fingers.

"Wait a minute!" he pleaded. "Look me right between the eyes—I think my mind is going. Now, then, hand it to me easy; there's heart disease in my family. Four thousand pounds a year! Is that twenty thousand dollars in our money, or do I just think so?"

"Something like that," said Kenneth Clifford, grinning.

Buck slid limply off the bench, wiggling his fingers feebly.

"Air!" he murmured. "Gimme air! My socks have got holes in 'em! When I eat I got to count my dough first to see if I've got enough for pie. I drink bartenders' mistakes even; but this guy here—he gets twenty thousand a year just for bein' alive! Air!"

"Oh, I say, Buck! Don't be a silly ass! Money isn't everything."

"That's what I've been tryin' to kid myself

into thinkin' for the last twenty years," said Buck, rising and shaking the dust from his clothes. "But if I had all the dough I could spend I reckon I could get along without the things it won't buy."

"Money," said Kenneth Clifford soberly, "will buy you everything in the world but the one thing you want most."

"Is that so? What do you want that you can't get for twenty thousand a year?"

"A girl," said Kenneth Clifford.

"Excuse me for buttin' in, Algy," said Buck after a pause. "I hadn't no right to ask that question."

"Never mind, old chap," said Kenneth Clifford. "It's all right; but——"

"Hey! You fellows gone to sleep out there? Come on! We're ready for this scene."

It was the voice of authority speaking through the lips of J. Montague, director.

"Right-oh!" said Kenneth Clifford.

"And get a wiggle on you!" said Montague. "The light's changing and I want to get it over quick. This is the action: Buck, you come in with the mail and find Dev sitting on the porch alone. You hand him this letter and go on into the house. Dev, you open the letter and register surprise. Hold that while I count five. We'll make a cut-in of the letter, showing that you've succeeded to the title and the estates and have been called home to England. You come in at five, Myrtle. Ask him what's

the matter. Dev, you hand her the letter; and while she reads it you register that you'd propose to her if you wasn't afraid. Start to say something and quit, and turn away with your head down—like this. . . . Myrtle, you ask him if he's going back to the old country. Dev, you nod your head—yes. Myrtle, do you remember that bully line in Arizona? 'You're going to ride away—without one word—to me!' Hand him that speech. Dev, you grab the letter out of her hands, crumple it up and throw it on the floor, and stamp on it. You give up the title for the girl—see? She holds out her arms to you— Bing!—into a clinch. You kiss—and that's the end of the scene. Got it? All right! Run through it a couple of times."

At the end of the second rehearsal a messenger boy entered, whistling discordantly.

"Say, w'ich of de ginks is named Dev—Dev—aw, some kind of a ham? Dey sent me out from de hotel. W'ich is him?"

"You're a pretty fresh guy for a feller your size," said Buck, taking the boy by the ear. "Telegram for you, Algy!"

"Ah-r-r! Leggo me ear!" growled the lad, kicking at Buck. "Youse movin'-pitcher Jesse Jameses gives me a pain!"

Kenneth Clifford, seated and ready for the final scene, was still staring at the cablegram when Jimmy Montague's voice brought him back to America and the business in hand.

"Come out of it, Dev!" he urged. "We're

going to make the picture this time. All set, Buck? Got the letter? Ready—Action—Go!”

Buck swaggered into the focal plane, handed Kenneth Clifford a square envelope, slapped him on the shoulder and passed through the wall representing the front of a Western ranch house.

“Gee!” he whispered to Miss Manners. “Algy got some kind of a jolt in that telegram. He’s white as a sheet. You know, that guy has got——”

“Three—four—five!” Montague counted for the cut-in. “Come on, Myrtle! . . . Oh, wake up, Dev! Get in the picture. Hand her the letter. . . . Now, then, register hesitation! . . . That’s all right! . . . ‘You’re going to ride away—without one word—to me!’ . . . Grab the letter, Dev! . . . That’s right! . . . Bully! Folks, that comes pretty near being a swell little love scene! Dev, I didn’t know you had it in you!”

Miss Manners stepped back and looked up at Kenneth Clifford with a question in her eyes.

“Well, Algy!” she said at length. “Why the realism, may I ask?”

Kenneth Clifford blushed.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “I—I’ve made believe to kiss you so often, my dear, that I thought perhaps you wouldn’t mind if—if I had a real one for once—just for good-by, you know.”

“Good-by!” said Miss Manners. “Are you going away?”

“Well, rather!” said Kenneth Clifford, drawing the cablegram from his pocket. “You remember I told you something about—a girl? See what she says: ‘Stop being an actor and come home!’ What I can’t understand is this: How in the world did she know what I was doing over here? I haven’t told a soul. Most extraordinary thing!”

Miss Manners laughed.

“Why,” said she, “the polo picture went to England, of course. I’ll bet she saw it and recognized you!”

“Oh, I say!” murmured Kenneth Clifford, aghast. “I should never have thought of that!”

“She couldn’t have missed that close-up of you and me at the end of the picture,” said Miss Manners mischievously. “Young man, I think you’ll have something to explain when you get home!”

“Ah!” said Kenneth Clifford. “In that case I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!”

And he kissed the lovely Miss Manners when the camera was not looking, which goes to show that Kenneth Clifford was not so slow, after all.

MAN-AFRAID-OF-HIS-WARDROBE

MR. BUCHANAN PARVIN, moving-picture Westerner by profession and extra man by force of circumstance, dropped his heavy rifle, shifted his blanket roll and haversack, removed his ancient fatigue cap and offered a perspiring brow to the cooling breeze.

“Nothing to it!” said Buck querulously. “Uncle Billy Sherman sure knew something when he called the turn on the war business. The real thing was bad enough, I reckon; but it wasn’t a patch on this moving-picture Civil War stuff. In Uncle Billy’s time if a man was winged he could lay down and take a rest, or else go to a hospital and have a pretty nurse hold his hand; if he was killed he was through for the day. There’s some sense to that kind of a war, but this bushwhacking that we’re doing ain’t got no beginning or no end.

“Take me, for instance. I’ve been killed on every steep hill in Los Angeles County and wounded every little while reg’lar; and I’m still packing this confounded blunderbuss around. I’ve helped to capture more cannons than Na-

oleon ever saw. I've crawled miles and miles on my stomach, collecting red ants and wood-ticks that I couldn't scratch because the camera was looking at me. I've charged till I was black in the face. I'm a veteran of Bull Run, Antietam, Lookout Mountain, Shiloh, the Wilderness, Gettysburg—and I held Grant's hawss at Appomattox and loaned him the makings of a cigarette. I've been in Libby Prison twice.

"Phil Sherman and me is pals. I showed him how to make that ride and rehearsed the hawss four times. I fought under Grant, Lee, Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, Bragg, McClellan, Hooker, Ben Butler, Jim Montague—and a-many more that I disremember right now. I'm a Yank one day and a Johnny Reb the next; I get it on both sides, so to speak; and what Uncle Billy said about this business goes double for me. I ought to have about a million dollars comin'—in pensions—but I'd swap the whole works for a nice cool scuttle of beer. What fool started this here war anyhow?"

The camera had run out of film and, while the photographer was reloading, the Union troops rested and cursed history. A portly gentleman in gray wig and beard and the uniform of an infantry colonel grinned at Buck from the ground where he had thrown himself.

"Cheer up, old horse!" said the colonel—behind his beard he was Charlie Jennings, a retired stock actor and assistant to James Montague, the producing director—"Cheer up!

This will be the last of the war pictures for a couple of months. We're going back to the wild and woolly in a day or two."

"Western stuff?" asked Buck. "Good news! Who told you so?"

"Jimmy Montague," replied Jennings. "He got word this morning to fix up a lot of Western scenarios quick. The boss in New York has signed A. Lester Hale to work in ten pictures—special Western leads. Ever hear of him—A. Lester Hale?"

"Sure!" said Buck. "He's the stage cowpuncher, ain't he? Since when has he been in the movies?"

"This is his first experience," said Jennings; "and what I can't understand is how the boss came to hook him. Hale is a tremendous success on the stage. Years ago he made a hit as a cowpuncher, and he hasn't played anything but cowpunchers since. Mighty good at it too. He's been starring with his own company for the last six seasons. His name on the billboards will make these Western pictures go like a house afire. The women are simply crazy about him. They think he's the only actor in the world."

"Huh! They do, eh? What do the men think about him?"

"Well," said Jennings slowly, "I guess Hale's all right. I played with him once in summer stock in Denver; and, though he ain't the sort of man that would ever really hate

himself to death, he may be a good fellow at that. I never got close enough to him to get a real line, because he was always a little bit upstage. Most stars are that way, Buck. But the women—he certainly is an ace with them!”

“Uh-huh!” said Buck, rolling a brown-paper cigarette. “I’ll do my level darndest not to let that prejudice me agin him. Never take a woman’s judgment about any man but yourself, Charlie. Ten times out of nine they’re wrong. If they like your hair or your teeth they’re liable to overlook a heap of dark spots in your character. Now when I was down in the Pecos country I knew a feller named Pete McCaskey.

“Mac was a right nice quiet sort of a guy until he got about seven or fifteen drinks under his belt, and then he’d go home and lick his wife. Not because he didn’t *like* her, you understand, but just because it was a kind of habit with him. Whenever I’m tanked right I get a craving to whale a street-car conductor. I don’t know why—it’s just a fool notion I get. Mac, he used to pike for home when he got about so much and give his wife a dressing down. Great big fat woman she was, with blue eyes. He called her Birdie.

“By and by Mac couldn’t get enough action with his fists, so he took to using the furniture; and old Doc Bowen would have to go over and patch Birdie up. One night Mac got familiar with a new brand of booze and went after Birdie with a bed slat. Doc Bowen told me that

woman's back looked like one of them old-fashioned crazy quilts—black and blue and green and yellow. The doc, he fixed her up the best he could, and then he handed her some advice.

“‘Look here, Mrs. McCaskey,’ he says. ‘Why don’t you tell Pete this rough stuff has got to stop? These parties he’s giving you are comin’ too reg’lar. Last week he nearly broke your arm; week before that it was your leg. Now he’s got your back all marked up like a zebra. You tell Pete he’s got to behave or you’ll quit him.’

“‘Why, doc,’ says Birdie, beginnin’ to bawl, ‘you don’t understand Pete. You don’t know what a good feller he is. In lots of ways he’s the most considerate man in the world!’

“‘Considerate!’ says the doc. ‘Your back looks like he was considerate, ma’am! It’ll be black and blue for a month. I wish you could see it.’

“‘I know it will,’ says Birdie, snuffling and wiping her eyes. ‘I know it will, doc; but, even when Pete’s drinking and roughest with me, he’s awful thoughtful in some ways. Believe it or not, in all the years we’ve been married he ain’t never yet so far forgot himself as to put a mark on me where anybody could see it!’

“‘And that’s the way a woman figures,” concluded Buck. “‘Their bein’ strong for Hale don’t make him *real*, you know. I got to see the bird before I make up my mind. . . . Come on, you noble heroes! The camera guy has got

the box threaded up and ready for business. I'll bet anybody three to one we have to make that last charge all over again."

II

JAMES MONTAGUE, producing director for the Titan Company and a person of considerable importance in the moving-picture world—which is rather a larger world than most people think—put on kid gloves and a stiff hat and went downtown to call upon A. Lester Hale as soon as he was advised that the star had arrived from New York. Jimmy was the sort of a man who would go barehanded before kings and emperors; but he felt it necessary to put on gloves for one who was to receive ten thousand dollars for working in ten moving pictures.

After some delay he was ushered into a three-room suite in the most expensive hotel in Los Angeles, where he discovered a tall, handsome young man in smoking jacket and furred Russian slippers, who found it too great an exertion to rise or shake hands, but waved a gold-tipped Cairo cigarette in languid welcome.

"You'll excuse me, mister—mister—I believe I've mislaid your card—but the newspaper men were just here and, of course, I had to get rid of them. Awful bore to be interviewed every time one turns round, isn't it? And they positively cost me a fortune in photographs."

"You've got a few left, I see," said Montague, looking about him. No less than eight different poses of the great stage Westerner were displayed in various parts of the room. "If the newspaper men hunt you it's better than hiring a press agent to hunt them."

"I dare say," remarked Hale carelessly. "It's a nuisance, though. Reporters run in at all times; they seem to have no respect for privacy, no finer feelings, no——"

A thin, sad young man came in from the other room and waited at Hale's elbow.

"Well, James, what is it now?"

"Beg pardon, sir, I telephoned all the newspapers, sir. Three of them wouldn't send reporters, but said they might print the photographs if——"

"That will do, James!" said Hale sternly. "You may go."

"Yes, sir," said the valet, disappearing noiselessly.

"Stupid fellow!" fumed Hale. "I don't know where he got that idea—oh, may I offer you a drink?"

Montague grinned at the clumsy attempt to cover up an unfortunate situation.

"Not so early in the morning," said he.

"Ah—perhaps I can do something for you?"

"No, I guess not. You see, I'm the producing director for most of the Western stuff that we put out—sort of a stage manager; and I dropped in to get acquainted and talk over the

kind of work that will show you to the best advantage."

"Oh, yes," said Hale. "A very good idea. Perhaps, though, Mister——"

"Montague," said Jimmy.

"Perhaps, Mr. Montague, it would be better if I should have a chat with your—dramatist, do you call him? I might suggest to him a few ideas and——"

"I'm the dramatist," said Jimmy cheerfully. "I dope out most of the pictures."

"Indeed!" said Hale, elevating his eyebrows. "I presume the things you are about to produce will be written round my impersonation of the Westerner—the cowpuncher type, you know. Of course you are familiar with the parts I play?"

"No," said Montague. "I may have seen you somewhere, but I don't remember it." If not actually turning, the worm was twisting slightly. "Can you ride a horse?"

Mr. A. Lester Hale flicked the ash from his cigarette with a gesture that dismissed the subject utterly.

"Anything that wears a bridle," said he.

"Fine! What sort of an outfit did you bring with you?"

"My stage costumes," said Hale. "I brought my own saddle and rope, and all that sort of thing."

"You handle a rope, then?" Montague was interested.

"Oh, yes," said Hale. "I had to use one in my play two seasons ago. I thought it might come in handy, so I brought it along."

"Bully!" said the director. "I can write a whole picture round a roping scene. We have twenty or thirty steers out at the farm that we use in Western pictures—Texas long-horns—and you can rope one of them."

"Of course I've never done any range work," said Hale—"not with real cattle, you understand; but the principle of the thing is the same."

"Ever had any experience with movie stuff—watched pictures being made, I mean?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said the actor. "This is my first offense, I assure you. I had some open time this summer; I wanted to see the West, and—here I am. It's a nice way to make expenses during the dull season, isn't it? I presume, on the whole, moving-picture work is much simpler than acting—no strain on the voice."

"Yes," said Jimmy Montague, "it's dead easy when you get the hang of it. Here is the address of the studio. If you will be there tomorrow at nine and bring all your things with you——"

"Nine!" exclaimed Hale. "Isn't that very early?"

"Not for moving-picture people. The light is better then. I'll bid you good-morning."

Jimmy Montague rolled back to the studio in

one of the company's automobiles, talking to himself.

"And that's the fellow that plays cowpuncher parts!" he soliloquized. "Ten thousand dollars in real money for ten pictures—expenses during the dull season! It's a high price for cheese."

The next morning A. Lester Hale, bag, baggage and valet, arrived at the Titan studio. Jimmy Montague, in a dirty slouch hat, disreputable chaps and high-heeled boots, welcomed him cheerfully.

"I play the heavies in the Western pictures," said Montague in explanation. "That's why I'm made up. This will be your dressing-room, Mr. Hale." It was the one the director had just vacated, consequently the best allotted to the men. "Get on your cowpuncher togs and don't make your face up very much."

The star looked about him and sniffed.

"This dressing-room is too small," said he. "Have you nothing larger?"

"Miss Manners has the largest dressing-room," said Montague. "She is our leading woman."

A. Lester Hale sat down on one of his trunks and fumbled with a gold cigarette case. He had the air of one who prepares to stand a long siege.

"Simply out of the question!" said he. "I should stifle in a coop of that size. Why, there

isn't room enough for me to hang up my things! And then I have my man!"

So Miss Manners was turned out of her dressing-room, a process involving a great deal of hard work for a young woman without a maid. Hale took possession at once, and forgot to thank her.

"Jimmy," whispered that very angry little lady, "your new leading man may know how to act, but if you cast him for a gentleman you'll have to rehearse every scene with him."

"I'm awfully sorry, Myrtle," apologized the director, "but you see how it is. He's got the theater idea about the star dressing-room and he thinks he's entitled to it here. Wait till I get him out on a location somewhere when there ain't any women round—and I'll make him change his clothes in a bunch of cactus or behind a horse!"

"Pass out your saddle, Mr. Hale," called Montague. "I'll have one of the boys put it on Teddy. He's the best-looking horse we've got. We're going to make the outdoor stuff first, while the carpenters get the interiors ready. We'll go into the hills and make some runs."

Buck Parvin was the man who did the saddling. His eyes opened wide as he inspected Hale's equipment.

"I've dreamed about saddles like this," said Buck, "but doggone me if I ever thought I'd hold one in my hands! Look at her, Jim! Ain't

she a humdinger? Hand-stamped leather, bucking rolls, Visalia tree, and—holy Moses, Jim, d'you reckon that plate on the cantleboard is gold? 'To A. Lester Hale from admiring friends.' Gee! No champion broncho-twister even won a hull like this! . . . Braided-hair bridle, single loop; headstall and cheekstraps all covered with silver dewdads—and A. L. H. on every one of 'em! Wowie! . . . Spanish spade bit! Reckon I better loosen up the chinstrap or he'll bust Teddy's jaw. . . . Bearskin saddle-pockets, with silver name-plates on 'em. That's poor, I s'pose; yes, perfectly miserable! . . . And feel of these blankets! Navajo, Jim, and as soft as silk!

"Why, say, you could cinch this saddle on to me and I'd be proud to have anybody ride me plumb downtown! The only thing that looks bad about the outfit is this braided-leather rope. She's a beauty, but she's been hangin' in the tiestraps for so long that she's 'most cracked in two from lack of use. Yes, sir—that rope is sure lashed permanent. If he ever made a cast with it and took a dally or two round the horn, zing!—good night, rope! Just wait till I show all this class to that Teddy hawss, and he'll be so puffed up he won't never look at the rest of them ordinary plugs!"

The favorable impression created by Hale's saddle was sustained and strengthened by his appearance as he stepped out of his dressing room. His legs were cased in white angora

chaps, which had been curried and brushed until each long silky hair was in its place. His trousers were of whipcord and the boots of soft leather with Mexican heels. His spurs were of silver, with an eight-inch shank and a two-inch rowel; and the chains dragged full six inches behind his heels as he walked.

About his slender waist was strapped a heavy cartridge belt, from which swung a stamped-leather holster, sheltering a pearl-handled and gold-plated forty-five caliber revolver—the same that had barked death to many a villain in the last act, and caused thousands of matinée girls to cover their ears and squeak with pleasurable fright.

His light-blue shirt was of silk, with a large embroidered monogram on the pocket. His crimson bandanna was also of silk, and the ends were passed through an immense gold ring, in which a two-carat diamond sparkled. His sombrero was of the softest gray beaver, eighteen inches across the brim, with a twelve-inch crown—price, thirty-five dollars. The band was of gold filigree, studded with tourmalines. His quirt was stiff with gold cord.

Buck Parvin took one long look and went out behind the developing room to express his feelings.

“Don’t cuss like that, Buck,” said Ben Leslie, the property man. “You won’t catch no fish.”

“Look at me!” said Buck tragically. “I used to be the niftiest thing on the Coast in the cow-

puncher line, didn't I? I had 'em all breakin' their necks to rubber when I went by. Folks used to say: 'There goes the real thing! Considerable class to that!' It was a mistake. I ain't real, Ben. I'm a bum negative—that's what I am. I'm full of pinholes, fogged on both ends, and light-struck in the middle. They wouldn't run me in a five-cent house—not even for a chaser. These clothes of mine looked pretty good an hour ago, but now I'm just sort of lingering round, waiting for the garbage wagon to come along—and then I'm going to climb aboard and say: 'Home, James!' . . . Don't laugh—doggone you! Can't you see your Uncle Buck's heart is cracked plumb in two?"

"What cracked it?" asked Leslie, a man of few words but keen perceptions. "Got a new lookin'-glass in the extry men's dressing room?"

"I've seen the difference between a phony and the real thing," said Buck. "So will you when you get a flash at that new leadin' man. Chaps lined with kid—hair on 'em a foot long; solid gold smoke-pole; Kansas City boots; silver spurs that weigh a couple of pounds apiece; diamonds all over him, like a pawnbroker's bride. Why, say, Ben, if I could steal them clothes and wear 'em just once at the Cheyenne Frontier Day—if I could put 'em on and kind of stroll down and stand in front of the Inter-ocean Hotel along about train time and let the boys look me over—I'd be ashamed to ask to

go to Heaven when I die! It would be stretching the luck too far. Yes, sir—this guy has got the richest and the best what is, and *all* what is, I reckon; and if he ever throws that hatband away ole Buck will jump after it if it's a thousand feet straight down!"

"Well," remarked Ben Leslie "handsome is as handsome does."

"Like hell it is!" said Buck savagely. "I sprung that chestnut on a cross-eyed woman once, figuring to comfort her a little bit."

"Did it work?" asked Ben.

"Got action on it right away quick!" said Buck. "She grabbed a skillet off the stove and just flattened it on my face. Folks that has to take second money get sore when you remind 'em of it."

III

It was late in the afternoon when the moving-picture Westerners returned to the studio. The new leading man dismounted stiffly and hobbled toward his dressing-room, looking neither to the right nor the left. There was in his stride a mixture of lofty reserve, wounded dignity and saddle soreness that caused Ben Leslie to grin as he sat in the doorway of the property room, checking off a list of props with a carpenter's pencil.

After Buck's horse was in the barn he sought

white leader, and I bet no jackrabbit could have out-run me gettin' away from there. Yes, sir, I certainly sifted some sand——”

Ben Leslie chuckled and leaped from the truck, disappearing in the direction of the saloon. Uncle Jimmy paused, startled.

“I might have knowed nobody would believe me,” said he. “But I didn’t dream it, else how come they to have a whole corral full of camels over yonder? And the thing that gets me is where did all them people come from so quick? I looked back once and——”

Sounds of argument came out of the darkness.

“You leggo my arm, Ben Leshlie!” said a thick voice. “You ain’t no frien’ of mine! You said I shot poor ol’ ’Laddin—you said it and Montague said it. I never hurt dumb alimal my whole life! Leggo my arm!”

“It’s all right, Buck!” Ben’s voice rang out cheerfully. “You didn’t shoot him; it was an old nut of a prospector. We’ve got him over here at the depot.”

“Wha—wha’s that?” roared Buck, immediately militant. “You got him—fell’r shot ’Laddin? Killed that ol’ white camel? Where is he? Show’m to me, Ben! We’ll fix him!”

Uncle Jimmy Belcher slid off the baggage truck with surprising agility for one of his ripe years and backed swiftly away into the shade of the depot building, fumbling at his hip. Buck, coming up at a run and being in no condition

to distinguish friend from foe, hurled himself upon Montague with a triumphant whoop.

"Here he is! Fetch a rope, Ben! Doggone you—you won't—murder no more—movin' pitcher—camelsh!" And at every other word he banged Montague's head upon the baggage truck.

Uncle Jimmy Belcher, pausing at the far end of the freight shed, heard the request for a rope and the uproar which followed it. He did not linger, but slipped inconspicuously round the corner and faded away in the direction of the corrals, Sitting Bull unlimbered for immediate action.

"Too darn much going on round here to suit us, Jimmy!" he wheezed. "What say we git our jacks and leave this fool town flat on its back? Yes, sir, let's do that! Too many camels and eediots in Daggett this evening! You reckon we better hurry some? Why, yes, Jimmy, you surely ain't forgot how to run, have you?"

"Well, o' course, Jim," said Buck, rocking unsteadily upon his high heels, but slightly sobered by violent exercise, "you've 'pologized to me and I've 'pologized to you and they ain't no more to be said. You fired me this afternoon for killin' a white camel and I bumped your head just now, and it turns out that we was both after another fell'r and he got away. You got

a sore head and I got a sore leg. That makes us even. No hard feelings? Shake!"

"No hard feelings," said Montague, touching a lump back of his ear. "I'm sorry I accused you of shooting the camel, Buck, but the evidence——"

"She did look bad, for a fact!" said Buck magnanimously.

"You'd better go to bed now," advised Montague. "You've got a hard day's work ahead of you."

"I still got my li'l ol' job?" asked Buck.

"Yes, and to-morrow we'll pick out a camel that won't bite."

"Nothin' could be fairer than that—abs'looly!" said Buck, making a dignified exit upon the arm of Ben Leslie.

Jimmy Montague remained seated on the baggage truck, wrapped in thought. He was patching together the old, old hodge-podge of cause and effect.

"By golly!" said he at last, "I'd like to get my hands on the fellow who wrote that article about the wild camels! He's responsible for everything!"

Three shadowy figures slipped into the desert and headed toward the east. The faint night breeze carried a yelping, snarling chorus. Uncle Jimmy Belcher smiled as he whacked his burros with a barrel stave.

"Got a reg'lar camp meeting to-night, ain't

you?" he cackled. "Well, you can thank me for it. Camel meat's pretty good, hey? Jimmy, what say we sleep out here somewhere? Why, seein' that they've got the rest of them wild camels hived up in a corral I reckon it would be safe enough. Yes, sir, this is the place for us—right out in the sand. We never did care much for city life nohow."

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

DAVID SELIGMAN, vice-president of the Titan Company and a prince in the moving-picture realm, had reached his position of eminence solely by reason of his ability to keep abreast of the times. No other branch of industry has developed with such astounding rapidity, but the changes, as they came, found David in step with the drum-beat of progress.

“Do something new, and do it first!” was his motto; and he clung to it, though he drove directors to the point of emotional insanity. From his office on Fifth Avenue, in New York, he kept an eagle eye on the field, and if he could not always be the standard bearer he was seldom far behind the flag as it moved forward.

A film pioneer, he had watched the evolution of the moving picture from the days of its very raw infancy, when anything that could be thrown on a screen was good enough to get the money, and the cost of photography was the largest item of expense. Then the novelty wore off and audiences began to demand some-

thing more than a plotless jumble of pictures. David took thought and issued a proclamation to his managers and directors.

"We've got to quit making up these picture plays as we go along," said he. "Up to now we have been getting away with it, because people didn't believe it possible to make photographs that move; but they come to see 'em and are satisfied. The game is getting too big for the bunk stuff; the public won't stand for a film without a story in it. Art—that's what they want; and we'll give it to 'em. Let's have real plays and real actors from now on."

Company payrolls doubled and trebled, actors were enticed from the stage, and scenario departments came into existence. Art entered into the making of moving-picture films, and this sufficed for many years; but original ideas became scarce, competition grew keen and the flag moved again.

"Names!" said David Seligman. "That's what they want now; good stories by regular writers and names to carry 'em. Some of the other fellows have been dramatizing novels and getting away with it—old moth-eaten novels that are out of date. A dead writer is no business. Me for one that's alive!"

A few days later Seligman touched an electric button and summoned his secretary, Marco Lazarus.

"You don't read much fiction—novels—do you, Marco?" he began.

"Where would I get any time to read?" asked Marco.

"You should take time," said David reprovingly. "You got your nights to yourself."

"A good musical comedy show is better than any book," said Marco with the air of one dismissing a subject.

"So you think," said David. "Now this book here"—he touched a flaring cloth-bound volume as he spoke—"which was written by a party named Peckinpaw—Marcellus M. Peckinpaw—maybe you never even heard the name of it—eh?"

Marco shook his head.

"The name of it is 'The Lure of the West,'" said Seligman. "I am surprised at you, Marco. It's a best seller and they advertise it everywhere, like a circus. Everybody is talking about it. I read it the other night and I don't wonder at it at all. It's got more action than a dog fight. In every chapter there is shooting. . . . Do you know any authors, Marco?"

"I seen one once at a theater," said Marco, "but nobody could have told it to look at him."

"Did you think maybe he would carry a pen behind his ear?" asked Seligman. "Now this Marcellus M. Peckinpaw is a little man with glasses and a cough. If you ask me I would say he is absolutely the extreme end of the limit."

"How do you know he is?"

"Didn't I have him to dinner last night at the

Astor? And didn't I sign him up for the moving-picture rights to his novel? Five thousand dollars it cost me before he would do business at all. And what do you think this party insists we shall do?"

"How should I know?" Authors and their ways were beyond Marco.

"I had to write it in the contract that he must be consulted about making the picture; and that, Marco, was a compromise. What this Marcellus M. Peckinpaw wanted was that we should let him take full charge and do the directing himself—and he never saw the inside of a studio in his life. Think of that for nerve! He says that we are liable to spoil the atmosphere of the book!"

"Atmosphere! What's that?"

"I don't know exactly, but in this case I think it is mostly gunpowder and cowboys and Indians. All the Indians I ever saw had plenty of atmosphere. You couldn't stay in the same room with one."

"Huh!" said Marco scornfully. "For five thousand dollars he should worry about a little thing like atmosphere!"

"Just what I told him—absolutely; but he would not sign any other way. He was going away mad and I had to meet his terms. I am paying his expenses to Los Angeles. I will advise Montague about the atmosphere, and Montague will get along with him somehow."

"Montague will be sore," prophesied Marco.

"Montague is always sore at this office," said David. "He kicks more than all the other directors we got; but he also delivers the goods. I sent him a night letter that he should get the book and read it and have a five-reel scenario ready when this Peckinpaw gets out there. . . . Would you like to read the book, Marco?"

"I'd rather see the picture," was the cautious reply.

"So would I," said Seligman. "Montague will make improvements on the story. He always does. What I can't understand is how a man living in New Jersey knows so much about cowboys and Indians. The book is full of 'em, Marco!"

"There ain't no Indians in New Jersey," said the secretary skeptically.

"Not outside of Princeton," said Seligman; "but this Peckinpaw, now, he knows regular Indians—feathers and yellow paint. He told me so. And he writes about a cowboy so natural that you almost see him. With everybody reading the book and talking about it, a five-reeler should get the money."

"Montague will be sore," repeated Marco. "You know he thinks he shall be the whole pig or none."

"Take a letter," said David. "You see, Marco, in order to land this Marcellus M. Peckinpaw I had to let him think that Montague would be a kind of office boy to him. I will explain to Montague that he must humor the fel-

low as much as possible. They will fix it somehow."

II

BEN LESLIE and Buck Parvin, property man and moving-picture cowpuncher, were loafing in the shade outside the Titan Company's studio building, smoking brown-paper cigarettes and exchanging reminiscences.

"And so I told him," said Buck, "pretty much what I thought of him. 'You are the most ignorant guy I ever saw in my life,' I says. 'You don't know nothing and always will; and you ought to be careful or the hawks will eat you up. You come round here telling me my business and some day I will get annoyed and hit you. I don't like your shape, your feet don't track, and there's something wrong with that wart on top of your shoulders.' 'You mean my head?' he says, kind of sore. 'Head!' I says. 'Don't kid yourself, Percival! That ain't no head. Your neck just naturally grewed out and haired over.' And that was how it started. He picked up a whippletree——"

Buck's narrative suffered an interruption in the shape of a small, narrow-shouldered gentleman, at sight of whom Buck's eyes and mouth opened and remained fixed in a combination stare and gape.

The stranger wore a slate-colored corduroy riding suit, reinforced with leather; pigskin puttees; a broad gray sombrero, very new and stiff as to crown and brim; a soft white shirt; a flowing tie, and immense round spectacles with heavy rims of dark tortoise-shell. His features were mild enough, but the spectacles imparted to his countenance somewhat the look of a startled ground owl.

"I—I beg your pardon," said the stranger, enunciating very clearly and peering at Buck's chaps and green silk shirt; "I beg your pardon, but perhaps you can inform me where I shall find a Mister—Mister——" He paused and, fumbling in an inner pocket, drew out an envelope, glanced at it and resumed: "Oh, yes—a Mr. James Montague. I have a letter of introduction to him."

"Straight ahead, first turning to the left and down the hall," said Leslie.

"Thanks very much," said the stranger, and entered the building. Ben and Buck exchanged amused glances.

"Name it and you can have it," said Ben.

"Thanks very much, old chap," mimicked Buck, "but I ain't collected any curios since I was a kid. Did you pipe that make-up? And I bet I saw something that you missed: The little sucker had a handkerchief up his sleeve an' a watch strapped on his wrist. He did, on the level!"

"And I saw something that you missed," said

Leslie. "I got a slant at that envelope and it was from the New York office—old man Seligman's private stationery."

"No! Maybe the high boss is tryin' to saw off a comedian on Jim. Or maybe this is a shipment to the animal farm, Ben. Him and that long-nosed anteater ought to be great little pals—eh?"

Ben thumped his knee, with a sudden exclamation.

"I've got him pegged, Buck! You know that five-reel Western picture that Jim has been working on for a week—the one he's making over from a novel? Remember how he was cussing round here about Seligman shipping the author out to help us put it on? Well, this is the fellow. Jim has been expecting him."

"That little billy-owl?" said Buck. "Get out!"

"I'll bet you the drinks. The round eyeglasses tipped his mitt. Authors wear 'em because they think it gives 'em that literary look."

"Him—write a Western novel?" scoffed Buck. "Why, where would he get it? It can't be done!"

In this Buck was mistaken. It had been done. Marcellus M. Peckinpaw—for it was indeed that renowned genius—had written a Western novel and a best seller. Western critics—crude fellows of the baser sort, no doubt—had hinted that Mr. Peckinpaw's knowledge of the noble

savage had been gleaned from the works of Mr. Fenimore Cooper. They had also pointed out that his cowpunchers conversed in a dialect unknown on land or sea; but these innuendoes were unfair as well as unkind.

Marcellus M. Peckinpaw knew his West and freely admitted it whenever possible. He had made one trip from ocean to ocean; men have written volumes on less. True, it was warm and dusty in the Pullman after the train left Kansas City and the curtains had been down during the daylight part of the journey; but, in spite of this slight drawback, Mr. Peckinpaw had managed to see a great deal of the sandy Southwest.

At Albuquerque, for instance, he had spent a fascinating half hour in careful inspection of the wooden-faced, pottery-peddling aborigines. The Indians had also inspected Mr. Peckinpaw; so the benefits, if any, had been mutual.

He had lingered one whole week in a tourist hotel on the Pacific Coast, dressing for dinner each evening and absorbing local color and atmosphere. Then, returning home by another route, he had seen the broad-hatted and bow-legged sons of Wyoming; in fact, had even spoken with one on the depot platform at Green River.

Nor was this all—far from it! “The Lure of the West” had been written under direct inspiration.

Mr. Peckinpaw, commissioned to do a magazine article dealing with the various places of amusement in the city of New York, had visited a Wild West Show in Madison Square Garden. The press agent of the establishment, scenting high-class publicity, had taken Mr. Peckinpaw below stairs to view the West at close range.

He had seen real Indians, feathered and smeared with ochre, reclining on bales of hay. He had been introduced to Chief Singing Mule, and had grasped the hand that had grasped the hand of the late lamented Sitting Bull. He had the press agent's word for it. He had seen a mangy buffalo; had heard a cowpuncher from Springfield, Massachusetts, warble the opening stanza of "The Cowboy's Lament"; had made obeisance before the sole surviving scout of the plains—and the very next week the first chapter of "The Lure of the West" had been written. It was a great novel. If there be doubters let them ask for a copy of Mr. Peckinpaw's royalty statement and thereafter hold their peace.

Mr. James Montague, himself a genius whose fame as a producing director girdled the globe, took a pipe out of his mouth to greet the distinguished visitor. It cannot be said that Montague was in a pleasant frame of mind. For four days he had wrestled mightily with "The Lure of the West," endeavoring to stretch it into five reels; and the things he had said about

Mr. Seligman and Mr. Peckinpaw came hot from his heart.

After the usual polite nothings, during which the men took stock of each other, Mr. Peckinpaw came abruptly to business.

"I presume you are ready to begin the—er—photography, Mr. Montague," said he. "My time is limited. I should like to finish by Saturday night, if possible."

"By Saturday night!" ejaculated the amazed director. "Holy Moses, man! Saturday night! How long do you think it takes to put on a five-reel feature?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, I'm sure," said Mr. Peckinpaw, stifling a yawn. "It's merely a matter of turning a crank, isn't it?"

Montague threw himself back in his chair and howled until the windows rattled.

"Merely a matter of turning a crank!" he said after recovering his breath. "That's good! That's immense! Say, look at this pile of typewritten pages, will you? That's only a piece of the scenario—just a beginning. Then, when everything else is fixed, I'll have to move the entire company out into the hills and pitch a camp. We may have to stay there a couple of weeks, getting the location stuff. After that we'll come back here and make the studio scenes. By Saturday night! If we have a lot of luck we may get through with it in a month! It'll take a week to get the extra people together."

"It seems a long time," said Mr. Peckinpaw; "but why bother with all these things?" He pointed to the typewritten pages. "Why can't you start at the beginning of the book and work through, chapter by chapter? That would seem to be the simplest way."

Montague's pipe sagged in his mouth and he stared hard at his visitor.

"Say, are you trying to kid me?" he demanded.

"Most certainly not. I was merely offering a suggestion."

"Oh, that was a suggestion, was it? I thought it was a joke. Well, Mr. Peckinpaw, I haven't the time just now to explain why all this preliminary work is necessary to the making of a moving picture. You can take it from me that laying out the ground plan of a five-reel feature is quite some job. It's not a thing you can go at hit or miss. I'll call on you at your hotel this evening and we'll go over the scenario together as far as I've got. Meantime, you might look round the plant and amuse yourself."

"But," said Mr. Peckinpaw, stiffening slightly, "Mr. Seligman told me I was to superintend this work. I have a copy of my contract at the hotel. Mr. Seligman said——"

"Dave is a great kidder," said Montague. "What he meant was that you should assist with your ideas as to the way the scenes should be played, and all that sort of thing. I'll be

thing as walking on his hind legs. He's feeling for bottom—see?—and kind of treading water. Soon as you feel him going out from under you take hold of the pommel with one hand and let him tow you. Then, when you're almost across, Buck jumps out of the willows and fires once. That's your cue to let go, throw up your hands and sink."

"Sink!" ejaculated Hale.

"Just bob under for a second," said Montague reassuringly.

"But why is it necessary for me to go under at all?" objected Hale. "Why wouldn't it be much more effective for me to fall forward on the horse's neck and let him bring me out—wounded?"

"Because it would crab the next scene," said Jimmy glibly. "That shows you washed up on a sandbank, unconscious."

"But I don't like the idea of going into the water with all these heavy clothes on," persisted the leading man.

"Of course they'll get wet; but you can change right away," said Montague. "That's one reason why I loaned you my old chaps. They've been wet so many times that it won't hurt 'em."

"I'm not worrying about your ratty old togs," said Hale with a scornful glance downward. "As a boy I was subject to cramps."

"My dear fellow," said Montague with acid sweetness, "surely you know I wouldn't ask you

to do anything I haven't done myself. This is a very simple moving-picture stunt. You go under water for a second and the scene ends there. Buck throws you a rope and we pull you out. Why, when we put on the pirate picture I walked the plank blindfolded and dropped forty feet into the ocean.

"In another water picture I went head first off the yardarm of a vessel. They tossed me off the San Pedro Breakwater tied up in a sack, and I had to cut my way out before I could begin to swim. This thing I'm asking you to do is dead easy."

"Easy for you, maybe," said Hale with a sneer. "I'm not a swimmer or a high diver."

Jimmy Montague's face slightly reddened, but he replied quietly enough, and his very calmness would have carried a threat to a less self-centered and egotistical individual.

"In the movies," said he, "a man has to do almost everything—well."

By this time the automobile was climbing the cañon road. On each side were towering walls, flecked with patches of brush. Below, in the willows, a swift mountain stream hurled itself over its rocky bed, swirling into deep green pools and racing over pebbly shallows. A cold wind ripped down the narrow cañon, bringing a chilling hint of melting snow in the heights above. Hale shivered and drew his coat closer about him.

As the road dipped away toward a ford Montague signaled to the chauffeur.

"We'll get out here," said he.

It was a lonely spot, deep in the cañon. There was no sound save the rushing cluck of the water and the thresh of the willows whipped by the keen breeze. Montague, carrying the tripod, led the way up the bank of the stream. Charlie Dupree, the camera man, came next, with his box and paraphernalia. Hale and his valet lagged in the rear. The chauffeur, to whom stunt pictures were no novelty, elected to take a nap in the tonneau. At times Jimmy Montague, crashing through the brush, caught snatches of conversation behind him and smiled grimly.

"It's not legitimate work! . . . Confounded slapstick effects! . . . Too cold! . . . An artist is entitled to some consideration, even in moving pictures."

Evidently Hale was pouring his troubles into a sympathetic ear, as attested by a low commiserating mumble from the faithful James.

In a bend of the stream the party halted, and Buck Parvin, sitting upon a rock and examining his battered forty-five-caliber revolver, gave them a noisy and cheerful greeting.

"Quite some swimming pool we've got here," said he. "I was just thinking if you didn't show up pretty soon I'd take a dive for luck."

At the bend the stream was perhaps seventy-five feet wide. Shallow at the other bank, it

sloped away into deep water, where the current was scarcely perceptible. Hale looked down into the pool, dipped his fingers into the water and promptly entered a vigorous protest.

"It's too cold!" said he.

"Nonsense!" said Montague. "You'll only be in the water a few seconds."

"Couldn't you double me in this scene?" he asked anxiously.

"Impossible! I can only double you in scenes where your face does not show clearly. You are so well known that any audience would spot the double in a second. . . . Charlie"—this to the camera man—"set your camera here. I want that stretch of sand on the other side. Shoot low, because I want as much water as I can get. It's a clear day; so don't open your lens too wide. Use your light meter for your aperture and time your shutter to it."

"Well," said Hale, "if you are really going to insist on this foolishness I suppose I must go through with it. You are responsible if anything happens. James, get my dry things out of the suitcases. You are a witness that I do this under protest."

"Yes, sir," said James. "I am."

"Your horse is over there in the willows," said Montague. "The water above is shallow—so you can cross there. When I give the word ride through that break in the brush on the other side and come into the water between the two white stones. You can leave the rest to

Teddy—he'll swim straight for the camera. Don't try to stay in the saddle after you get into deep water. Trail along and let Teddy tow you—and when Buck shoots let go. All I want you to do is to go under water if only for a second; and you'll be so close to the bank that we can have you out in a jiffy. No mistakes on this—unless you want to make it over."

"But we always make a scene twice!" said Charlie Dupree, and paused suddenly as Montague's heel descended upon his toes.

Charlie was an experienced camera man and he had seen many strange things in his time. He subsided, muttering:

"What is this—a joke?" he growled as he fiddled with the shutter.

Plainly it was no joke to A. Lester Hale, gingerly splashing across the shallow ford above the pool. Neither was it a joke to James, shaking out bath towels and fresh underwear with the troubled manner of one upon whom a great responsibility had been laid. It was evident that James, like his master, feared the worst.

Jimmy Montague and Buck Parvin, conferring in whispers, grinned at each other.

"It's no josh about that water being cold!" said Buck. "You ought to brought an oil-stove along to thaw him out afterward."

"I don't know how this will end," said the director; "but back me up in anything I start."

"Sure!" said Buck. "I'm after that steady job you was talking about."

The first time Montague gave the word Hale rode slowly down to the bank of the stream and stopped his horse to remind all present that he was working under strong protest. The second time he asked for additional instructions; but the third time he entered the water.

"Come on, Teddy!" yelled Montague. "Good horse! Come on!"

He produced an apple. Teddy saw it and headed straight for the director, entirely disregarding a strong nervous pull on the bit. Not for nothing had the horse played star parts in dozens of film dramas. Hale's face whitened as the icy water swirled about his knees.

"O-o-h!" he gasped. "I—I can't do it! I can't! Tell the horse to go back! It's—it's too cold!"

"Come on with him, Teddy!" called Montague; and Teddy having seen the apple, came on.

Suddenly Hale felt the saddle sinking under him and the water rose to his shoulders. With a howl of fright, he threw himself forward, clutching blindly at the only portion of the horse still above water. One hand found Teddy's left ear and fastened upon it with a desperate grip. The other one was tangled in the mane.

"What are you trying to do?" yelled Buck. "Want to drown that hawss? Leggo his ear, you fool, and give him a chance to swim!"

Advice and insult went unheeded. Hale's eyes popped out and his chin receded until it was all but invisible. His face froze into a perfect mask of terror. For once in his life he forgot he was being photographed.

"Help!" he cried. "Help!"

"Let go!" roared Montague.

That was the last thing Hale meant to do, however. He tried to pull himself forward upon the horse's head, and Teddy's fore legs beat the air wildly as his nose disappeared under the water.

"Rope him!" shouted Montague to Buck. "He's drowning Teddy!"

"I got something better than that," replied Parvin; and whipping his revolver from the holster he leveled it and fired. At the crashing report Hale's hands went high over his head, and with a bloodcurdling scream he sank from view.

"He's murdered! You've killed him!" shouted James, the faithful, jumping up and down on the bank.

"Murdered your grandmother!" snarled Buck. "The wad must have hit him, that's all."

"Don't let that fool flunky get into the picture!" yelled Dupree, making a fine photograph of a swimming horse and a few bubbles behind him.

Jimmy Montague was the first to appreciate the gravity of the situation. With a reproach-

ful look at Buck Parvin, the director stripped off his coat and plunged into the pool. After what seemed a long time he reappeared, his fingers twined in Hale's long hair.

"The rope—quick!" gasped Montague. "He's hurt!"

Buck drew them both to shore, and on a level stretch of sand Jimmy Montague applied first aid to the drowning. As he pumped vigorously at Hale's arms he shot a question at Parvin.

"What was in that gun—rock salt?"

"Nah!" said Buck. "Just a little candlewax on the wad. Look here!" He ripped open the silk shirt and laid his finger on a small red mark upon the chest. "That's some shooting!" he whispered. "I nailed him when he was trying to climb up between Teddy's ears. He ain't hurt, Jim. He's stalling with you."

"Not on your life he ain't stalling!" said Montague. "He's on the level with it. You scared him almost to death!"

After a time Hale began to moan and toss his head from side to side. Jimmy Montague drew a relieved breath.

"He's all right now," said he to the frightened James. "It was the shock that got him, and he didn't swallow much water."

The leading man opened his eyes and stared about him wildly. Then he clutched his breast and groaned.

"I'm shot through and through!" he sobbed. "Get a doctor—quick!"

"Oh, rats!" said the unfeeling Montague. "It was only the wad from the blank cartridge that hit you."

"But I—I felt it. I feel it yet!" said Hale.

"Never even put a hole in your shirt," said Buck consolingly. "Look and see."

It took twenty minutes to convince Hale that he was in no danger of immediate death; when assured upon this point he consented to sit up, resting his head upon the shoulder of the faithful James. It was then that Jimmy Montague had an inspiration.

"Take it easy for a while," said he, "and then we'll make the scene over. Your valet jumped into the picture and cloaked the action. Tough luck!"

"W-what?" Hale forgot himself to such an extent that he sat up without support.

"You'll have to do it again," said Montague. "Your valet here lost his head and——"

"I'm to go into that water again?" Hale's voice rose shrill with hysteria. "Risk my life for your fool picture? Not for anything in the world!"

"But your contract calls for——"

"What do I care about a contract?" sputtered Hale. "You can't hold me to it! I quit! I quit now! I've got a witness here!"

"Yes, sir," said James. "You have."

"Well," said Buck Parvin, thumbing the cylinder of his forty-five, "I don't know's I blame you a darned bit. Too much is plenty!"

“Jim,” said Bill Cartwright, “you’re the eighth wonder of the world! He says we can sue him if we want to, but he’ll never fill that contract. How did you do it?”

“Easy!” said Montague. “It’s a poor director that can’t dig up a scenario to fit an emergency, Bill. But if you’re shy a stage cow-puncher you might give a real Westerner a job. I’ve put Buck on the payroll.”

WATER STUFF

BUCK PARVIN, moving-picture cow-puncher, arrayed in the conspicuous habiliments of his calling, sat on the steps outside the main building of the Titan Company and thrust forth his new boots for all the world to admire. Fashioned of the choicest materials, with the squarest of square toes and the highest of high heels, the midleg portions scroll-stitched in graceful and intricate designs, and surmounted by broad bands of glittering patent leather, they were, indeed, boots to challenge the eye and demand the respectful attention of the most casual observer.

Since his promotion to a position on the weekly payroll at a salary that amazed him afresh every Saturday afternoon, Buck had been able to indulge his passion for expensive gauds and trappings. The new sombrero was a dream in gray beaver, the silk shirt a poem in Nile green; but the Kansas City boots were the very apple of Buck's eye. They marked the floodtide of gratified ambition and made him one with leading men, champion broncho

busters, street medicine fakers and proprietors of Wild West shows.

Such boots are to be seen in shop windows in Cheyenne, Denver, Fort Worth, Oklahoma City and Las Vegas. They are seldom encountered east of the Mississippi River, and nowhere are they common or likely to become so, for they cost a great deal more than a suit of ready-made clothes and something less than a good saddle. In this day of inflated food values those who can afford such luxurious footwear are scarce. There are cheap imitations of course, but they are just that and nothing else, and serve but to make the genuine article more desirable.

For the further edification of the assembled extra people, Buck rolled a brown-paper cigarette, employing none but the fingers of his left hand—and those who do not believe this feat requires dexterity and practice should try it at their leisure.

As he gave the flimsy cylinder a final twist and flourish Buck paused, eyes upturned and ear inclined toward an open window whence issued a mournful chant, pitched in a low, rumbling key. The window looked out from the private office of James Montague, scenario author, heavy actor and producing director, in whose narrow littered sanctum film dramas were born.

Ben Leslie, the property man, slouched across

the yard and Buck summoned him with a jerk of his head.

"Some kicks, boy—some kicks!" said Leslie approvingly. "You didn't find those new boots hanging on a bush, I'll bet!"

"Not so you could notice it," said Buck with modesty. "Just got 'em out of the express office—made to order. But that ain't what I wanted you for. Listen here a minute and see if you can get this.

*"Many brave hearts are asleep in the deep;
So beware! Be-e-e-e-ware!"*

"What's biting Jim now?" continued Buck, with a trace of anxiety in his tone.

The property man, a lean, melancholy person of much assorted experience, given at times to economy in language, rose, hitched his trousers fore and aft and gravely performed the first steps of the dance known to musical comedy as the sailor's hornpipe.

"Doggone it!" sighed Buck. "I had a hunch that was what ailed him. Some more of that rotten water stuff, eh? It's a pity Jim wouldn't get a company of square-faced Swede sailors and mermaids and be done with it!

*"For many a stormy wind shall blo-o-o-w
Ere Ja-hack—comes home—again!"*

"He's full of it this morning," said Leslie. "Genius must be burning like a fire in a furni-

ture factory. Do you know what he's doing, Buck? Jim is trying to warble himself into thinking that he's the Clark Russell of the movie business; but he doesn't know one end of a ship from the other. That's temperament, son—temperament."

"Uh-huh!" Buck shuddered slightly. "Let him sing his fool head off! Believe me, them songs about bounding billows and raging mains was never written by a guy with a weak stomach. Do you reckon Jim will hire that ratty old ship again and stake us all to some more seasickness?"

"The *Alden Besse*? She's already hired."

"And me a regular member of the company!" groaned Buck.

"Well, you would be an actor!" grinned the unfeeling Ben.

"Listen!" said Buck. "If I have to go to sea any more in that old tub all the acting in the world won't keep me from laying right down on the deck so soon as we get outside the San Pedro breakwater. After that I'll be just the same as dead—only not near so comfortable. Montague makes me sick! Here he's got all the dry land in California to work on—and he chooses the Pacific Ocean! You know, Ben, sometimes I think a movie director ain't human!"

"He's got to give the public what it wants," said Leslie, quoting Article I, Section 1, of the Showman's Creed. "The other water picture

is getting a lot of money. That's the answer, old horse!"

"If it gets a million it won't break me even for what it done to my stomach," said Buck morosely. "I'm a game guy, Ben—and you know it. Everybody knows it. I don't mind taking fool chances with my life; but monkeying with my stomach is another proposition. Put me on ole Pieface and I'll ride him as high and handsome as anybody. I'll take as hard a fall as Jim Montague can frame up for me—and he's framed some jimdandies!"

"When it comes to runs through brush or over boulders I can make all them Spring Street cowboys and film Cossacks quit like sheep in a blizzard—but salt water? Deep salt water? No, sir! You never heard of a guy named Buck that was a sailor. Me—I begin to get seasick as soon as I buy my steamer ticket. There's something about the look and smell of the ocean that hits me right where I live. Green ain't no healthy color for water, Ben—and you know it. I've come down some terrible steep hills for Jim Montague and never cheeped about it; but if he's quit the cavalry and joined the navy I reckon I'll have to ask for a change of venue."

"Shucks!" said the property man. "A little attack of seasickness is the healthiest thing a man can have. It tones up your whole system—acts like a tonic."

"A tonic, eh?" sneered Buck. "Now you've said something! Doc Bowen gave Baldy Brad-

ley a tonic when he was getting over the fever that time down in the Pecos country. It looked like harness oil, it smelled like a burnt boot, and it tasted like both of 'em, with a few other things thrown in to make it more difficult. Whenever it come time to slip Baldy a jolt of the stuff it took five able-bodied men to turn the trick—three to set on him, one to hold his nose, and one to steer the spoon.

“ ‘Doc,’ says Baldy one day, ‘what in Sam Hill do you put in that stuff that makes it taste so bad?’

“ ‘Why, several things,’ says the doc, blowing out his double chin like a pelican. ‘That’s a tonic to build you up. I take it myself sometimes.’

“ ‘Take it now, doc,’ says Baldy, ‘and keep it! Gimme the fever back again; I’d relish it more.’

“And that’s your Uncle Buck on this seasick thing. If I’ve got to yo-heave-ho to be healthy I’d choose to remain an invalid like I am now. I’d rather be a well extry man and stay on dry land than play special seasick leads at a hundred a week.

*“Rocked in the cradle of the deep,
I lay me down in peace to sleep.”*

“Gosh!” said Buck. “You don’t reckon Jim figures to keep us on that water all night?”

“Forget it!” said Ben Leslie, rising. “You

might have a good part in this next picture.”

Buck regarded his friend reproachfully

“I had a good part in that last one,” he said; “but my breakfast got jealous of me and busted into the film. How can a man act when his stomach is acting, too?”

“Don’t ask me!” said the property man. “Ask Jim—here he is.”

Montague stood on the steps and surveyed the morning gathering of extra people with the cold appraising eye of the experienced director—the connoisseur in features and types.

Broken-down actors, with frayed collars and cuffs, trying to hide a pathetic eagerness behind a calm, professional exterior; gum-chewing girls in cheap finery, powdered and painted within an inch of their lives; young men smitten with an ambition to smirk before a camera and call themselves actors forever afterward; a sprinkling of the down-and-outs of both sexes—it was the typical motley assemblage. To some of them an appearance in a moving picture was nothing more than a joke or a new experience; to others it meant three dollars a day and bread and butter.

“You girl on the end—with the green feathers!” said Montague briskly. “Can you swim?”

The young woman laughed loudly and flirted her plumes.

“Swim!” she answered. “Well, I should say not! I’m an actress, Mr. Montague. I was

with the Worldwide and the Transcontinental people; and the——”

“Good night!” said Jimmy. “Nothing doing if you can’t swim.”

He descended to pass among the applicants and the line shifted uneasily.

“Water stuff! Water stuff!” the whisper ran.

“Well, what do you know about that!” demanded the young woman with the green feathers. “There was a time in this business when talent got you something, but now they don’t use nothing but acrobats!” And by the manner in which she glared at Montague’s back it was plain that she did not hold him guiltless of this decadence in art.

Slowly the line of applicants melted away.

“Nothing but swimmers this morning!” said Montague. Some of the young men qualified and were engaged. “I must have more women,” muttered the director. “How about you?”

Montague paused before a girl who sat twisting a handkerchief nervously between her fingers. Her cheap blue serge skirt was shiny at the seams, her tan shoes were run down at the heels and her hat was of the obsolete peach-basket variety. There was a frightened look in her brown eyes as she raised them.

“Can you swim, kid?” asked Montague not unkindly.

“I—yes, sir,” stammered the girl.

“Good!” said Jimmy. “Ever had any expe-

rience in pictures? No? Well, that doesn't make much difference. Be at the electric depot at six o'clock next Thursday morning. Bring along a change of clothes and some towels. You get five dollars for the water stunt. What's your name?"

"Jennie Lee."

"All right, Jennie. Go to the office and have them fill out a card for you. That's the way we keep in touch with our extra people; and when we need you again we can notify you."

"Thank you, sir," said the girl as she moved away.

"Scared stiff!" thought Montague as he looked after her. "Little shopgirl or something. Not much like the rest of these actresses. A fine type and she'll photograph well. Pretty thin, but she's got nice eyes."

A few moments later Buck Parvin, sunk in fathomless melancholy, became aware that a young woman was addressing him.

"Excuse me, sir," and the face under the peach-basket hat flushed crimson, "but do you know whether I shall be expected to bring a bathing suit?"

"Huh? What's that?" Buck looked up, and what he saw prompted him to rise and remove his sombrero.

"I'm sorry, miss," said he, "but I don't know any more about this next picture than the man in the moon. If you'll wait I'll find out for you."

He was back again almost instantly.

"You'll want bloomers, but no skirt. The rest of the stuff will be furnished by the company. It's a costume piece. Reckon you're kind of new at this business, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir. I thought perhaps you could tell me what I should be expected to do."

Buck laughed.

"Nobody knows that but the director," he said. "He'll tell you in plenty of time. Say, do you ever get seasick?"

"I—I don't know," said the girl. "I've never been on the ocean."

"Gee, but you're lucky!" said Buck.

II

JACK LA RUE, leading man of the Titan Company and, as such, privileged to ask questions and annoy directors, insinuated himself into Jimmy Montague's private office, where he found that capable person perspiring over a list of properties for the new picture.

"Oakum; red-fire; smoke-pots," read La Rue over Montague's shoulder. "What are you framing up for us now, James? Something tough, I suppose."

"No," said Jimmy, intent upon his task. "This one is going to be dead easy."

La Rue sniffed audibly.

"Yeh!" said he. "All your pictures are dead

easy—to hear you tell it. That Mexican war thing, for instance. That was going to be a cinch; no rough stuff, no stunts at all—straight acting. I had to jump off the top of a 'dobe house, ride down the side of a cliff, swim a river in all my clothes, and do an Alexander Salvini out of a window into a brushpile. I've been picking cactus spines out of myself ever since. Heaven is my witness, Jim Montague, never again will I jump into a brushpile head first without looking to see what's in it!"

"Always kicking!" said Montague pleasantly. "You wouldn't be a great actor if you couldn't roar at the director every few days. I suppose I planted that cactus in the brushpile for your especial benefit!"

"I wouldn't put it past you," said the leading man. "But, come, what's the new stunt to be? You can't sidetrack me with an argument."

"Another water picture—and a bird, if I do say it as shouldn't! I'm going to pull something new—something that hasn't been done before—a fire on a ship at sea."

"You don't call that new, do you?" demanded the actor. "It's been done to death and nobody ever got away with it."

"It was done with miniatures," said Montague sternly, "and that's the reason the pictures were frosts. People are on to that fake stuff, Jack. You can't build a boat four feet long and burn her in a mudpuddle and fool anybody into thinking she's a regular ship. It would

go once, but not now. Audiences are too wise for miniatures and the magic-lantern stuff. They want the real thing. I'll have a real ship—a real ocean——”

“You won't have a real fire though. How will you get the effect of one?”

“You should worry about my effects!” snapped Montague angrily. “Smoke-pots all over the place—in the rigging and on deck. For the flame we'll touch off a lot of oakum on sheets of galvanized iron. That'll give us a real blaze all along the deck line. Red fire for a glow—and there you are! A fire effect? I'll get one that will knock their eyes out! The old *Alden Besse* will look as if she was burning from stem to gudgeon. Can't you see what a background that will make for the people as they jump overboard? Can't you see that thick smoke rolling up, and the flames shooting along the rail, and the reflection in the water, and——”

“Oh, that's it!” interrupted La Rue. “I jump overboard, do I?”

Montague paused, his enthusiasm suddenly chilled. He drew a long breath through his nose.

“Say,” drawled Montague at last, “it must be awful to hate yourself the way you do! You're the whole works round this place, ain't you? Nobody else counts at all! Here I sweat blood and dope out a really great picture—something original and startling—something

that all these other directors will try to copy—and I can't even *tell* you about it! Can't get a ripple of enthusiasm out of my leading man! His little bit is all that interests him!"

"But I jump, do I?" persisted La Rue, who was a young man of few ideas and direct methods.

Montague threw up both hands in token of surrender.

"Yes—confound it—you jump! You're the captain of an emigrant ship back in the fifties, bound round the Horn to California. You fall in love with one of the cabin passengers—that's Myrtle. Fire in the hold. Women and children first—and all that sort of thing. Not enough boats. Life raft is put over the side, but breaks loose and drifts away. That's where the jumping comes in. Myrtle in her cabin, overcome by smoke. You rescue her—a studio scene, of course—run to the rail and do a Brodie with her in your arms—the last two people off the ship. Then you swim straight into the camera, and——"

"Just a second!" said La Rue. "You've got a great picture there, Jim—a bully picture; but don't forget that the old *Besse* stands up out of the water like a church. It's a long jump from her rail. Doing it single would be easy, but I'm not stuck on trying it with a woman in my arms. Myrtle is no featherweight, you know; and if she overbalances me it'll look rotten in the film. Why can't I throw her over-

board and jump after her—or else let her down with a rope? It seems to me——”

“Nothing of the sort!” Montague burst into a sudden rage. “Who’s running this company? You’ll jump with her in your arms—in *your arms!* Do you understand? I’ve listened to all the kicking that I’m going to take from you, La Rue! The next time you try to edit a scenario for me I’ll——”

“Oh, all right—if that’s the way you feel about it!” said the leading man as he reached for the doorknob. “Have it your own way; but I was thinking——”

“What with?” rasped Montague. “Who’s paying you to think? You’re an actor—a great actor—and that lets you out. Be a good fellow and beat it, Jack! Can’t you see that I’ve got work to do?”

Buck Parvin chose this inauspicious moment to ask a favor. He creaked into the room, grinning ingratiatingly and trifling with the brim of his sombrero.

“Well!” said Montague gruffly. “What do you want?”

“Jim,” said he, “my health—it ain’t been very well lately. I may not look it, but I’m a sick man. This studio stuff is breaking me down. I been used to the open air, and I——”

“What you need,” said Montague, without looking up, “is a little sea trip. I’m writing you a nice fat part in the next picture. You’re going to be the first mate of the *Alden Besse*.”

"But, Jim," expostulated the unhappy Buck, "you know how sick I got the other time! I can't do no acting on the water. If you had my stomach——"

"I'd be an ostrich!" finished Montague. "You're almost as much of a nuisance as Jack La Rue. On your way before I bounce a paper-weight off your head!"

"And you won't let me off?"

"Certainly not. What do you think I pay you thirty dollars a week for?"

Buck grunted and moved toward the door. There he faced about and emptied the locker of its last despairing shot.

"If I must, I must!" said he dolefully. "But listen to reason, Jim, and don't cast me for a first mate. Write in a part for a corpse and let me play that. I won't need no rehearsing at all!"

III

THE good ship *Alden Besse* rocked at her moorings, groaning and sighing as she lifted with the rush of the tide. She groaned because she was very old, and she sighed because her hull was deeply incrustated with the barnacles of other days, which tore the moving water into tiny ripples, producing a low, hissing sound.

Built by honest but shortsighted men who had no vision of steam, the *Alden Besse* was paying the penalty imposed on archaism by an age of

progress and invention. The world had moved on and left her behind. She had outlived her pride; but her too-solid construction forced her to linger beyond her day—a relic of the vanished period when American clipper ships spread their sails to every wind that blew across the Seven Seas.

Hongkong and Canton knew her well in the sixties and the seventies, when she was new and listed as one of the fast Cape Horners. Rich cargoes were her portion in those days—tea, silks and spices for the New York market—and she poured gold into the coffers of her owners. Then progress dealt her the first blow. The Clyde-built iron barks invaded the Orient and the wooden clipper ships were forced to fight for a share of the trade. They could no longer pick and choose. A few years of fierce competition ushered in the tramp cargo steamers, with their lower freight rates, superior speed and greater tonnage; and the *Alden Besse*, together with all other sailing ships, faced the beginning of the end.

She loafed about the Far Eastern ports for several months before she fell into the hands of the Japanese Government, which reënforced her teak with an armor-belt of oak timbers, mounted guns on her deck, and made of her a naval training ship.

It was an easy berth, but it could not last. The old order changed—wooden ships-of-war gave place to swift steel cruisers and the stick-

and-string navies of the world became obsolete. Japan followed the lead of other nations and the *Alden Besse* was sold for a song.

She next appeared on the other side of the Pacific, where she was engaged in the sugar trade, plying between Honolulu and San Francisco. Again steam drove her out and she dipped into the South Seas, trafficking in copra, cocoanut fiber, vanilla and coffee. She became a sort of maritime panhandler, haunting strange ports, thankful for small favors and bartering her self-respect for a pittance. At lengthening intervals she crept through the Golden Gate, dirty and dingy, and smelling to Heaven of mixed cargoes. Her last voyage brought her to San Pedro Harbor, where she was sold for dock charges—an ignominious ending of a long career.

For months the old ship lay at her moorings, deserted save by the watchman, stripped of her sails and most of her fittings—a sorry spectacle, at which the steam craft of the harbor hooted in derision. Useless in any sort of coastwise trade and valueless except for her solid timbers, the *Alden Besse* was doomed to destruction; but progress, having ruined her, intervened to save her from this final shame.

There came a keen-eyed young man—a director in the employ of a moving-picture company. He had a scenario that demanded a ship—and a ship he would have. He saw the *Alden Besse*

and fell in love with her stately lines and towering spars.

"Just the ticket!" said he. "I'll rent her by the day, put a couple of cameras aboard and stage this picture right."

"Not the *All-done Besse*?" said the seafaring men. "Why, that old tub ain't got no sails!"

"That's a mere matter of detail. I can hire a tug and have her towed to sea."

"She'll tow like a brick house! There's tons of barnacles on her bottom."

"The barnacles," said the director, "will not show in the picture."

"There's no ballast in her. She's high out of the water and as light as a feather. She'll roll something awful!"

"Let her roll!" said the young man calmly.

The seafarers abandoned the landlubber to his lunacy and went away shaking their heads; but, in spite of pessimistic prophecies along the waterfront, the old ship's first film appearance proved a tremendous success, artistically as well as financially. It was something new and a movie audience dearly loves a novelty.

Other directors, quick to see possibilities in the *Alden Besse*, besought their scenario editors for sea stories, and the venerable clipper became the marine arm of the movie industry—a piece of renting property worth owning.

For a time pirate pictures were all the rage, and the *Alden Besse* carried more buccaneers than ever sailed the Spanish Main. On her

hitherto respectable decks scenes of mortal combat were enacted. Cutlasses flashed along the rail and ancient firelocks spat from the rigging. Blindfolded prisoners bravely walked the plank, prodded thereto by inhuman captors with rings in their ears and daggers in their teeth. Beautiful maidens were rescued at risk of life and limb—or, failing in this, came at last to love the pirate chief and reform him.

Then mutiny upon the high seas engaged the attention of the scenario departments. The cutlass gave way to the marline-spike and the firelock to the bulldog revolver. Cruel captains were dealt with according to their deserts and bucko mates reaped the rewards of demerit. At the beck and call of many producing directors the *Alden Besse* led a busy life, cutting strange capers in her old age.

On this particular morning she stared down coldly on a laughing, chattering crowd that advanced along the wharf. James Montague was in the van, flanked on each side by a camera expert.

“Bully light to-day!” said the director, squinting at the sun.

“Yep!” said Charlie Dupree, one of the camera men. “Better not waste any of it. Where do we set up first?”

“Right here on the wharf. Cut in the gang-plank and as much of the ship as you can get. Look out for your background and don’t get any buildings in it, because this is supposed to be

Glasgow or Liverpool. Departure of the emigrant ship. Weeping and wailing—and all that sort of stuff. Affecting farewells on the pier.”

“I get you,” said Dupree. “Cast Buck Parvin for an emigrant. He and that girl he’s picked up are about the saddest things in the bunch. He was grouching all the way down in the car.”

“Huh! Buck thinks he’s going to be seasick,” said Montague. “Now, then, all you extra people, hop aboard and get made up. No time to lose!”

“Women dress in the cabin and men on the deck!” bawled Jennings, Montague’s assistant. “Hustle, now!” As a production *The Emigrant Ship* was an ambitious undertaking, requiring seventy extra people besides the regular members of the company and the entire working force of the Titan studio.

Over one hundred strong, men and women and laughing girls swarmed up the gangplank; and the decks resounded to the swift tapping of high-heeled shoes and the joyful whoops of the youthful extra men, who regarded the entire expedition as a lark. “They’ll be singing another tune before long!” Thus Buck Parvin darkly, lagging in the extreme rear with Jennie Lee.

“Is the water very deep—where we swim, I mean?” asked the girl.

“Moving-picture actors,” said Buck, “ain’t got no regular swimming places like other folks.

We hit the water wherever the director says. It wouldn't surprise me none if Jim Montague heaved us all overboard a couple of miles out to sea and made us swim ashore. He ain't got no more consideration for an actor's feelings than a billy-goat. Once he made me—why, hello! You ain't getting sick already, are you?"

"No," said the girl quickly. "No, I'm all right, Mr. Parvin."

"You look kind of white round the mouth," said Buck critically. "Does your stomach feel sort of restlesslike? That's the way it starts with me."

"No, it isn't that; only—only I'm afraid I can't swim very far. I never tried it, and——"

"Oh, I was just kidding about that," said Buck. "It'll be a short swim; they always are—just a flash in the water and out again."

"Perhaps I ought to tell the director. What shall I do, Mr. Parvin?"

"Do nothing!" advised Buck. "If you tell Jim he'll give you a bawling out. What he don't know won't hurt him. And say, I wisht you'd call me Buck. They all do—it's shorter."

"But Buck is such a queer name."

"Hush! I've got a queerer one. My mother named me Rollo; but the old man, he tacked on the Buchanan—to take the curse off, I reckon. Rollo! Ain't that a noble name for a full-grown man?"

Montague stood at the gangplank counting noses. His quick eye noted several things and

he saluted the stragglers with appropriate remarks.

"Don't let that film cowboy scare you, Jennie!" said he. "The trouble with him is that he's opposed to water in any form. The only people who are ever seasick are the ones who are afraid they're going to be. Hurry along and get ready! . . . You, Buck! Didn't I tell you to dress a first mate? What sort of boots are those for a sailor to wear?"

Buck halted with a conscious downward glance. In order that no part of their glory might be wasted he was wearing his treasures with the trousers stuffed into the stiff, stitched tops.

"What have you got against these boots?" demanded Parvin, glaring at the director. "They cost me twenty-seven dollars and express charges from K. C., Missouri. Made to order! No first mate ever had a better pair—you can win a bet on that!"

"Cowpuncher boots—at sea?" howled Montague. "Why, man, those high heels will register a mile away! Get some shoes—confound you! What do you want to do—burlesque this picture?"

Buck passed up the gangplank, muttering mutinously. He sat down on a spare spar lashed in the scuppers and examined the boots carefully. No—he would not discard them—director or no director. He would compromise by drawing the trousers down over the gorgeous

tops. As he was about to offer this sop to authority a passing tug set the *Alden Besse* to bobbing merrily up and down, and from that very moment boots and all other professional considerations passed out of Buck Parvin's mind.

Later, when he was prone upon the deck, spent and empty, his head pillowed upon his arms, he heard as from a great distance the voice of James Montague commanding him to come and be a first mate, a man, a mouse, or a long-tailed rat; but Buck was beyond insult, and the director went away, trailing lurid remarks behind him.

"Buck's a quitter—that's what he is!" said Montague to Ben Leslie.

"Oh, no, he ain't!" said the property man. "You can't quit until you've started—and Buck ain't going to start."

IV

At three o'clock in the afternoon a calm fell on the deck of the *Alden Besse*, while Jimmy Montague, hoarse and hatless, his shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows, conferred with his assistant, checking up the amount of work accomplished. The old clipper, just outside the breakwater and in tow of a tug, heaved and tossed to the long, oily groundswells that shoul-

dered in from the Pacific, and her aged rigging creaked dismally with every plunge.

It had been a lively day on the deep. Montague, mindful of his enlarged payroll and anxious to complete the water stuff in one day, drove the company at top speed, scene following scene with bewildering rapidity. The extra people, herded here and there like sheep and used as a human background for the principals in the cast, were given no time in which to analyze physical sensations. Two cameras clicked constantly—a precaution against makeovers—and while Montague rehearsed and directed one scene Jennings busied himself preparing the next.

“Pretty fast work, Jim!” said the assistant, consulting his memorandum book.

“Not so bad!” said Montague, wiping his brow. “That’s about all of the deck stuff, I guess. Flag the captain of the tug and have him take us inside the breakwater. We’ll want a smooth sea for the swimmers. Tell the people who are going into the water that they can take off their shoes—no use in spoiling ’em. This stunt is just a quick flash overboard, and the stockings won’t register. They’ll be able to swim better without their shoes, too. Where’s Ben? I want to see him.”

The property man hoisted himself out of the companionway, imperturbable as ever, hitched his trousers fore and aft in true nautical style, and came to a rigid salute.

“Got the smoke-pots in the rigging, Ben?”

“Aye aye, skipper!”

“Oakum ready?”

“All it needs is the match. When do we pull the big smudge?”

“As soon as we get inside. Listen now! I’m going to cut in the stern of the ship for the jumps and I’ll want plenty of smoke, but not enough to hide the people as they come to the rail.”

“That’s easy. The wind is off shore.”

“Turn loose a little of the oakum where the ship is cut down on the side——”

“The waist, skipper—the waist!” corrected Leslie.

“All right—the waist. A little fire there, but not much—just enough to make a showing. Touch off the smoke-pots on the rear mast——”

“Holy sailor!” ejaculated Ben. “The mizzenmast, Jim! Be technical, can’t you?”

“Never you mind the technicalities!” said Montague. “You give me the sort of a fire effect I want and let it go at that. Then, after the jumps, we’ll go still farther away with the tug, so we can cut in the whole ship; then turn loose the whole works—smoke-pots, oakum, red-fire and all. Give her everything you’ve got; and see that none of your stooges show their heads over the rail. The *Alden Besse* is supposed to be deserted by that time. Do you get me?”

“Absolutely! Leave it to me and I’ll smoke her up to the queen’s taste.”

"How's the quitter getting along?" asked Montague.

"Better," said Ben. "He was able to cuss me the last time I poked him up. Pretty soft for Buck! That pretty little new girl is sitting beside him and holding a cold towel on his head."

"Humph!" grunted Montague. "He's not *game*—that's what ails him! Now there's little Dupree—seasick as a dog all day—but he never missed a turn of the crank except when he had to run to the rail."

At the same moment Buck was detailing his symptoms for the benefit of the faithful Jennie.

"I've got a fierce headache and black spots floating in front of my eyes," said the stricken one, essaying to sit up. "My stomach feels like somebody had used it to churn sour milk in and there's a dark green taste in my mouth. I've got palpitation of the heart and I'm as weak as a cat; but otherwise there ain't a thing the matter with me. I reckon I'll live till night, at least. It was mighty nice of you to stick round the way you did. I won't forget it; and if you're ever seasick——"

"Oh, but I was—this morning."

"And went on working just the same?" cried Buck. "Well, they say that a woman can stand more suffering than a man. I reckon it's true. Doc Bowen used to say——"

"Come on, you swimmers! Get ready!"

"That's Jennings," said Buck. "Better run

along and—why, see here, sister, what's the matter? You ain't scared, are you?"

"I—I'm afraid I am," quavered the girl. "I didn't think it would be like this—away out on the ocean!"

"But you said you could swim!"

"Only a little—and I've never been in deep water in my life. It—it frightens me!"

"Oh, shucks! There's nothing to be scared of. There'll be somebody handy to grab you if anything goes wrong. Once you get wet all over, you won't notice it at all."

"And you're sure there'll be somebody there?"

"Why, of course! Whoever heard of a moving-picture actor getting drowned!"

The girl went away reluctantly, leaving Buck to speculate upon the inconsistencies of feminine nature.

"She's seasick and never lets a yip out of her," thought he; "but the notion of getting wet stampedes her plumb off the reservation! Women are too various for me—I give 'em up!"

V

BEFORE the tug drew alongside to receive the director and the camera men, Montague addressed the entire company from the after deck-house of the *Alden Besse*, Buck being the only absentee.

“Now this is the action,” said Jimmy—“and pay attention to me, because I haven’t got time to repeat it. We will first make the boats rowing away from the ship. You folks who were in the deck struggles and the launching scenes, take the same places in the boats that you had before—dressed the same way too. The men at the oars will pull over toward the tug and across the sidelines. Be careful you don’t drift back into the picture. As you leave the ship be looking back at her—all of you—and register grief—like this.”

Here Montague registered grief—a very simple matter when one knows how.

“You women, wring your hands and cry. Here’s a ship—burning up at sea. It’s a terrible thing! All your friends and loved ones are left on her; you may never see ’em again. Try to get something of that fear into the picture—and if I catch you looking at the cameras it’ll cost you a day’s pay! You look at the ship—and keep on looking at her until you’re over the sidelines.

“Next we’ll do the liferaft, drifting away from the side. Jennings, you coach ’em in the action—it’s only about ten feet or so.

“Now, then, here’s the big stunt of the day! Where are all those swimmers? Come down here in front so I can see you. This water scene won’t run much over thirty feet in all, but it’s the most important one in the picture and I don’t want any boneheads or smart Alecks

crumbing it up for me—remember that! The liferaft will be over between the tug and the ship. When you hear me holler Go! you're to start jumping. Go overboard from the waist there—it's lower. Don't all jump at once—two or three at a time; and keep on coming. When I say jump I mean jump! I don't want any exhibition dives or posing on the rail—no head-first stuff. This ship is supposed to be red hot and you're getting off of her as quick as you can. Never mind making it pretty—you hit the water feet first.

“I want a couple of girls to register fear—you, Anderson; and you, Lee. When you climb on the rail look down and hesitate—sort of shrink back; make it look as if you were afraid. Then jump. And another thing—when you get into the water cut out the fancy swimming. No showing off and no skylarking. You boys, remember that! Tear out for the raft as if your lives depended on getting there in a hurry. That's all for you extra people.”

“And when do I jump?” asked Jack La Rue.

“I'm getting round to you now. At the beginning of the jumping scene, Jack, I want you to establish yourself at the rail there—up above the waist. Give a quick look round and then register that you've just missed Myrtle. Rush over and duck behind that little coop where the stairs go down.”

Here Ben Leslie emitted a sepulchral groan and took his head in his hands.

"Myrtle, you be waiting for Jack there. When the extra people are all in the water I'll give you a signal, Jack, and you carry Myrtle to the rail—the same place where you established yourself before. Register exhaustion—you've been breathing smoke, remember. Ben, I want you to plant one of your stooges in that coop with a couple of smoke-pots, so that we'll get the effect of Jack coming through the thick-est of it."

"Aye, aye, commodore!" said Leslie. "But don't call it a coop. That's the after companion-hatch."

"Say, where do I jump from?" demanded La Rue.

"From the rail up above—there'll be less smoke there."

"And farther to go before I hit the water!" grumbled the leading man. And he scowled at the lovely Myrtle Manners, who was to be his partner in the plunge.

"It's a straight falling jump," said that practical young woman, "and not a fancy dive. We oughtn't to have any trouble."

"We! We!" sneered La Rue. "I'm the one that's got to do it all! And you're liable to turn me over in the air——"

"Not if you know your business!" said Miss Manners tartly.

La Rue retorted in kind and Montague's voice blared above the argument.

"Swim for the raft, Jack, and keep hold of

Myrtle all the way. We'll 'pan' you right down the middle of the picture to the raft; and—oh, for the love of Mike, quit jawing, you two! Anybody would think you were married! . . . Now, then, the boat scene first. There'll be no rehearsals; so don't make any mistakes!"

VI

THE boats had pulled away from the side, freighted to the gunwales with duly registered grief and fear; the liferaft had been maneuvered into position midway between the tug and the ship, and a hush of expectancy fell on the *Alden Besse*. Over the water came a hoarse bellow. James Montague, on the tug, was megaphoning his compliments to the property man.

"What in the double-dash, blankety-blank-blank is the matter with that smoke? More pots there, Ben! Touch off the oakum!"

Ben Leslie and his assistants—stooges, in the vernacular of the profession, the same being short for students—swarmed over the after part of the ship, distributing stubby roman candles, which when lighted belched forth great quantities of acrid, yellowish vapor. These were the smoke-pots, without which there would be few film fires.

The oakum flared suddenly in the waist and a dense black smoke-cloud rolled along the deck, enveloping Buck Parvin, who had suffered a

temporary relapse. He crawled out of the fire zone, strangling and choking and wiping his eyes. From a safe distance he looked back upon the made-to-order inferno.

"Gosh-all-zicketty!" he coughed. "I always knowed Jim Montague could raise hell; but this is the first time he ever raised her so high that I could see her! What in thunder is coming off here?"

Through the swirling smoke Buck caught glimpses of the after part of the ship. La Rue, very imposing in his captain's uniform, waited at the rail to establish himself, while Myrtle Manners sulked behind the hatch and examined her makeup with the aid of a pocket mirror. Jennings and the swimmers were grouped below on the deck. The assistant director was gesticulating violently and portions of his harangue reached Buck's ears:

"No funny business! . . . You jump when I tell you to! . . . Never mind having your picture taken! . . . The bigger the splash, the better!"

A sudden gust of wind cleared the deck of smoke for an instant and one figure stood out, clear and distinct—a slender girl, her face white save for the splash of carmine on her lips, her hands clenched at her sides. Then the smoke hid her again.

"Good Lord!" groaned Buck; "has that kid got to jump as well as swim?"

"Heads down, you stooges!" bawled Leslie.
"How is she now, Jim?"

"Better!" floated back over the water.
"We'll make it now. Ready!—Action!—Go!"

The two cameras upon the tug began to click in unison as the first of the extra men flashed over the bulwarks and dropped like a plummet, feet first, making a tremendous splash.

"Lovely!" said Montague. "It's a better effect than I thought it was going to be. Faster, there, you boneheads! Faster!"

On board the *Alden Besse*, Jack La Rue strode from the rail and disappeared in the smoke, determination to do or die written large upon his heroic shoulders. Jennings, bent double behind the bulwarks, drove the extra people to their task.

"You next! And you—and you! Jump!"

Buck Parvin, watching the thinning ranks of the swimmers, crept down the deck, bending low to escape the cameras. Jennie Lee was the last to go. Jennings reached out and took her by the arm.

"Get up there and register fear! Hurry!"

The girl mounted the bulwarks, looked down over the side—twenty feet to the green water—and cringed, shuddering.

"That's Lee!" said Montague, on the tug.
"A born actress! You'd think, to look at her, that she was scared to death!" Then, through the megaphone: "Don't overact! That's

enough! The picture's waiting on you! Jump!"

Buck Parvin, crouching below, looked up and saw the terror in the girl's eyes.

"You've got to go now!" he urged. "You're established on the rail! If you don't jump you'll spoil the picture!"

"Oh, I'm afraid! I'm afraid!" whimpered Jennie. "There's nobody down there to help me if I sink! I'm afraid—and it's so far too!"

Jennings raged on the deck; Buck pleaded; and hoarse, inarticulate howls of rage came from the tug.

"Jump! Jump!"

Jack La Rue, squatting behind the hatch, saw nothing of all this, but he heard Montague's voice uplifted profanely.

"He means us!" said La Rue; and picking up the young woman he staggered to the rail. At the sight of him James Montague grazed death by apoplexy; and Charlie Dupree, who knew something of dramatic values, sucked in his breath with a whistling sound.

"Good-night, nurse!" muttered Dupree. "Jack has crumbed this scene for fair! Why didn't the fool stay back there?" But, like the dependable photographer he was, he continued to make his two revolutions a second, counting the film, foot by foot.

By precedent and every rule of stagecraft the hero is entitled to the center of the stage and, in his one great moment, the undivided at-

tention of the audience. La Rue, by blundering into the picture at the wrong time, was dividing the big scene with a cowering extra woman—and taking the short end of it. Montague gurgled and estimated the cost of another day's work.

With the singleness of purpose that stamps a selfish man as well as a great one, La Rue looked neither to the right nor to the left. He planted one foot on the rail, cast an imploring glance heavenward and floundered over the side—making a very bad jump, indeed. At the same instant Jennings, who had not seen La Rue at the taffrail, pushed Jennie Lee violently outward, and she fell, twisting and screaming, into the water.

“You’re a fine stiff, Jennings!” said Buck as he rushed to the bow, where he could look over the side without fear of getting into the picture. Jack La Rue was swimming steadily toward the raft, towing Miss Manners; Jennie Lee was struggling in the water—once she disappeared entirely. Buck ran back to the waist.

“That kid can’t swim!” he cried. “What shall we do?”

“Maybe they can trim her out of the film!” said Jennings.

“She’s *drowning*, I tell you!” shouted Buck.

There came a bubbling cry for help, followed immediately by a terrific blast from the megaphone.

“Somebody go in after that girl!”

Buck Parvin placed one hand on the bulwarks and vaulted over the side. Two vigorous strokes carried him into action. Exhausted, helpless and frightened out of her wits, the girl grasped Buck round the neck and clung to him with the last ounce of her strength, dragging him below the surface of the water. Buck fought himself free from that strangling embrace and, seizing her by the hair, struck out for the raft, yelling for help.

“Get that, Charlie! Get that! It’ll save the picture!” screamed Montague, dancing up and down. “Come on with her, Buck! Right for the raft! Pan ’em in, Charlie! Get all that! It’s great stuff!”

It is a good director who can turn even an accident to account, and a good camera man who does not lose his head or his count in emergencies. Dupree, one eye in the viewfinder and both hands flying, tilted the black box slightly and with the panorama attachment held Buck in the exact center of the picture—a maneuver that drew roars of protests from the leading man.

“Hey! What are you doing there?” yelled La Rue.

“Shut up!” barked Montague. “I’m saving the picture that you ruined!”

Ordinarily it would not have been a hard swim, but Buck was below par physically, empty and weak and shaken; and the girl, crazed with fear, fought him desperately every

stroke of the way. He had gone into the water fully dressed and his twenty-seven-dollar boots, filling with the first plunge, weighed him down like anchors. Strangling and spitting, Buck reached the raft at last; and Myrtle Manners—as much woman as actress—drew the half-conscious and hysterical girl to safety. Buck managed to hook one foot over the top of the raft and hung there panting.

“A lift, Jack! I’m all in!” he gasped.

“It’s a wonder to me you wouldn’t wait till I got through!” snarled the leading man. “That fool girl crabbed my jump and you crabbed my swim!”

“Too darned bad!” wheezed Buck. “I should have let her drown to oblige a stiff like you!”

“The poor child has fainted!” cried Miss Manners.

“Yes, and this poor child is going to faint too, unless he gets help!” said Buck.

La Rue seized the boot and tugged with all his might. Two or three of the extra men grasped Buck by the shoulders and heaved him up on the raft, where he lay, face downward, suffering a last rending attack of his old enemy.

“How much did she run?” asked Montague when the cameras ceased clicking.

“Eighty-two feet,” said Dupree; “and about fifty of it was Buck and his lady friend. Gee, but that rescue scene was bully! I thought

Manners could do the best drowning stuff in the world, but that skinny little extra woman hung it all over Myrtle! Fought like a wild-cat, didn't she?"

La Rue sat on the edge of the raft, scowling at a boot he held in his hands. He had torn it from Buck's foot while hauling him aboard. It was soggy and limp and dripping—a sad ruin of its former beauty, for cowboy boots are not made to hold salt water. After some time La Rue allowed the boot to slip over the side of the raft. It gurgled once and found bottom at twelve fathoms.

VII

JAMES MONTAGUE came from the projecting room whistling like a meadow lark. He paused to speak a few words to Buck Parvin, who sat on the studio steps gazing mournfully down at a pair of aged and disreputable boots.

"I've just seen the negatives of the water stuff," said the director. "The rescue scene came out great, and so did the ones I made of you and Jennie afterward. That was a good idea—writing in parts for you and the girl. It switched the picture all round and put La Rue's nose out of joint; but it was the only thing to do."

"Did the films show what became of that other boot?" demanded Buck, betraying sudden interest.

"Are you going to start that argument all over again?" asked Montague.

"I want a new pair of boots," said Buck doggedly. "One of 'em I lost and the other is plumb ruined. Twenty-seven bucks them boots stood me, and express charges from K. C., Missouri!"

"You won't get any twenty-seven-dollar boot item on my expense account!" said Montague. "But, just to show you that my heart is in the right place, turn in a bill for five dollars and I'll O. K. it."

"Keep your five dollars! And the next time any of your extry people start drowning on you, fish 'em out yourself!"

"That's a fine thing to say! Most anybody else would have been proud of saving a girl's life. That little Lee kid——"

"Yeh!" said Buck bitterly. "I was out to see her the other night. Her mother accused me of throwing her off the ship a-purpose, so I could make a grandstand play! Called me a low, degraded theater actor, and slammed the door in my face. For years I've been wanting to do just two things—save somebody's life in front of a camera, and own a pair of them swell K. C. boots. I get the boots, all right; then I lose 'em saving a girl's life—and now I'm in bad with her folks!"

"Tough luck!" said Montague.

"Only one man ever had it tougher. I had a pal down in the Pecos country named Scott

Hastings. Queer duck, he was; but all right in spots when you found out which spots they was. Scotty always said that when he got the dough from his old man's estate he was going to have a ringtailpeeler of a time. His notion of a blow-out was to harness himself up in a boiled shirt, with a celluloid collar and cuffs, and paint the town red. Scotty got the *dinero* finally—six hundred and thirty dollars, it was, all in a chunk—and I went to town with him to help spend it. First thing he did was to stake himself to a boiled shirt, a big, high celluloid collar, and celluloid cuffs.

“ ‘Now that I'm all dressed up like a horse,’ says Scotty, ‘we'll have a big five-cent seegar apiece; and then we'll pile this town up in heaps and run rings round her!’

“He struck a match to light the seegar and the head flew off and lit the collar instead. The cuffs chimed in about the same time. Talk about your pillars of fire! Scotty went down the middle of the street like a runaway comet, and if Dud Baxter hadn't roped and throwed him he'd have run his fool self to death! They took Scotty to the hospital and did him up in cotton batting and linseed oil for about three months. When they let him out his bill was exactly six hundred and twenty-eight dollars and ten cents. Darned good thing they didn't make it fifteen or Scotty would have had to owe 'em the nickel!

“That come from setting his heart on some-

thing and getting it. I'm going to quit wishing for things, Jim, because it seems like the minute I get 'em luck comes along and switches the cut on me."

"You haven't been wishing for any cash bonus, have you?" asked Montague.

"No. Why?"

"Well, that's all right, then," said the director, grinning. "I can't charge the boss twenty-seven dollars for boots; but I did slip over a little fifty-dollar bonus for you, Buck. It's not coming to you because you lost the boots or because you saved the girl's life. You saved the Titan Company a makeover and another day's pay for seventy extra people! *Sabe?*"

"Fifty bucks!" breathed the cowpuncher reverently. "Bill Cody himself won't have a thing on me now!"

BUCK'S LADY FRIEND

THE members of the Titan Company, comparing notes, agreed that something was the matter with Buck Parvin, though opinion was divided as to what that something might be. A subtle change had come over the spirit of that casual and careless son of the silent drama, a change that manifested itself in many ways and was, therefore, open to many interpretations by his associates.

Jimmy Montague, director, actor and main-spring of the western branch of the Titan Company, noticed it first. A director notices everything first, which is the reason why he holds his job.

Buck began to develop distressing lapses of memory, forgetting the business of his scenes, thereby costing the company something in wasted film and drawing heavily upon Montague's small stock of patience.

"No, no, no! I told you to hand Jack the letter before you made the exit! I rehearsed you twice, and you go sleep-walking over the sidelines and ball up the entire scene! What's the

matter with you lately, Buck? Get on to yourself, and for pity's sake don't jump so when I speak to you!"

When reproved while the camera was clicking, Buck would start guiltily and look toward the director, thus committing another crime beyond excuse or pardon. In the movies, where everything goes by looks and gestures, nothing registers quite so heavily against realism as a startled glance in the wrong direction. It makes an awkward break in the action of the scene and attracts undue attention to the machinery, which for the sake of the illusion should remain hidden. Hamlet, pausing in his soliloquy to exchange ribald greetings with the stagehands, could do no worse.

Charlie Dupree, artist with a camera and aware of it, noticed a growing inclination on Buck's part to linger in front of the lens and register full-face photographs rather than action.

"What's got into Buck lately?" he complained. "That mug of his would stop an eight-day clock, but every chance he gets he shoves it square in front of the box and holds it there. He can't think he's pretty, so what ails the sucker?"

"I know," growled old Jennings, the assistant director. "Buck is beginning to think that he can act. So long as he was just an ordinary extra man you could depend on him to do as he was told. Then Montague went out of his

way to put him on the regular payroll with the rest of us, and now, confound it, the rough-neck actually thinks that he's an actor!" Jennings, a graduate from the legitimate, could never forget that he had been two seasons on the kerosene circuit with Keene. The memory of those distant triumphs was often with him. At such times he lowered his voice a full octave, swore strange oaths, said "me" instead of "my," and treated the entire company with lofty condescension.

Bill Cartwright, presiding genius of the projecting and assembly rooms, where negatives are scrutinized for defects and the strips of film trimmed and patched together in order that they shall tell a smooth and connected story, was amazed to receive a request from Buck for scraps of waste film, always from scenes in which he had played a part.

"You can have as many of 'em as you like, Buck," said Cartwright; "but I'm blest if I see what you want of 'em! They're only negatives, you know."

"They'll do fine for souvenirs," said Buck, putting the scraps carefully away in his pockets. "And, say, when you trim up the courtroom scene that we made to-day—the one with me on the witness stand—save me a strip of that, will you?"

"That's funny," thought Cartwright. "Buck Parvin's been working here for a couple of years off and on and he never asked me for

any film before. Wants to lug it round and show it to his friends, I suppose. A regular kid's trick!"

Jack La Rue, the leading man, who was not popular with Buck but was nevertheless so popular with himself that the general average did not suffer, noticed that Buck's sombrero was adorned with a large celluloid button upon which was a bald statement of fact and a somewhat impertinent query:

"I'm somebody's baby; whose baby are you?"

A rush of judgment to the head warned La Rue to withhold comment until Buck was out of earshot, thus postponing the crisis.

Myrtle Manners, the leading woman, as wise as she was pretty, and once an object of dumb adoration on Buck's part, noticed that his eyes no longer followed her, and being a woman she drew certain conclusions from that. Being a sensible woman she said nothing.

Ben Leslie, the property man and Buck's chum, a lean, loose-jointed individual with two eyes that were open most of the time, noticed all these things and many more, shaking his head over some of them.

"Nothing to it—Buck's got it bad," he reflected. "All I hope is that it ain't a widow woman with children. A ready-made family is the worst kind of a family what is, and Buck's just the particular kind of a darn fool that would fall for a widow."

The finishing touch was added when Buck appeared at the studio one Monday morning, disguised in a starched pink shirt, a high white collar and a flowing crimson necktie. Buck's taste ran joyfully to violent pot-pourris of color, but a white collar and a stiff shirt were things that demanded explanation.

"Your nose is bleeding, Buck," began Leslie, by way of opening the subject.

"It is not!" said Buck, startled into putting his hand to his face.

"Oh, beg pardon, that's a necktie, ain't it? Why, of course it is! And a white collar too! What are you made up for this morning, Buck?"

"This ain't no makeup. Can't a feller buy any new clothes without getting bawled out for it? I paid for 'em; that's all you need to know."

Jack La Rue appeared, trim and natty as a leading man should always be, swinging a light bamboo cane. He was in time to catch the last sentence and his dark eyes took in the situation at a glance, twinkling mischievously as they rested upon the collar.

"Howdy, Ben! Who's your friend? . . . Why, as I live, it's Buck! And all dolled up like a sore thumb! Now you're getting some sense. When are you going to scrap-heap those Kansas City boots and that cowboy hat?"

Buck grunted deeply, but did not reply.

"What's the celebration?" persisted La Rue.
"Why the boiled shirt and the collar?"

"No celebration at all; just something to make little boys ask questions."

"Oh, well, if that's the case I'll ask you one: Who is she?"

"That's some more of your business!" was the reply.

La Rue grinned at Leslie.

"I'll bet Buck has been telling her that he's an actor," said he, and there was malice behind the bantering tone. "A regular actor, eh, and now he's got to dress the part to make good. What?"

The shot went home. Buck's face flamed suddenly, shaming his cravat.

"I reckon I got as much right to call myself an actor as some folks I could name," said he doggedly. "It wasn't me that quit in that last stunt picture, and I didn't holler for a double in the riding stuff because I had a toothache. I can still manage to set up in the middle of a hawss without using my teeth to hang on by."

La Rue laughed mockingly and sauntered away toward his dressing-room. Buck looked after the handsome leading man with sullen eyes.

"Ben," said he, "I can stand just so much of that feller's society and then he goes against me. I ain't hunting trouble, but one of these days Mister La Rue is going to crowd the limit too far and I'll swing an uppercut on him. Yes,

sir, I'll move his nose up on top of his head so the rain'll run into it and drown him. Who give that four-flusher any license to meddle in my private affairs? Has he been made chicken inspector round this town, or what?"

"Then it ain't a widow," said Leslie, immensely relieved. "It's a girl."

"I ain't said if it is or it ain't," replied Buck. "I ain't said a word, but take it from me there's class to her."

"Uh-huh," said Leslie. "Blonde or brunette?"

"What difference does that make? They all look pretty good to me. I ain't never had so many of 'em on a string that I could afford to be partickler about a color. I'm in luck if I can ketch 'em one at a time. . . . Say, Ben?"

"Say it; your mouth's open."

Buck glanced behind him and lowered his voice mysteriously.

"She's red-headed, Ben," he whispered, "and, believe me, she's some woman!"

The property man received this interesting confidence in a singular manner. He rose to his full height, which was considerable, and solemnly extended his hand.

"Red-headed?" said he huskily. "Good-by, Buck. Good-by, old scout. I thought you had a chance until you pulled that line on me. It's all off now. Good-by." And Ben sat down

suddenly with the air of one who will not trust himself to speak further.

"Sa-a-y, where do you get all this good-by stuff?" demanded Buck. "I ain't going anywheres that I know of."

"That's the pitiful part of it," said Leslie, wagging his head slowly from side to side. "You're on your way, but you don't know it yet. You won't know until it's too late."

"Won't know what?" asked Buck, bewildered as much by Ben's manner as by his words.

"I'm surprised at you," continued the property man. "At your time of life and with your experience! Didn't anybody ever tell you that strawberry blondes are dangerous?"

"How do you mean—dangerous?" asked Buck suspiciously.

"Why," said Ben, "everybody knows that red-headed women have got the marrying bug in the most aggravating form. It's always been that way with 'em. Didn't you ever read history?"

"Nothing but 'The Life of Jesse James,'" said Buck. "What's history got to do with it?"

"A whole lot. Look at Cleopatra and Sappho and Helen of Troy and the Queen of Sheba and all those female kidnapers! Red-headed, wasn't they?"

"How in Sam Hill do I know?" said Buck. "They was before my time."

"Well, it would pay you to look 'em up,"

said Ben. "All red-headed women are the same. If a fellow comes along and they like his looks, they nail him before he can bat an eye. Just bing! and they've got him. It seems to go with the color of the hair. They're natural-born wives, every one of 'em, and they can't help it."

"Aw, rats!" said Buck uneasily. "I don't believe it!"

"You can laugh at me, but you can't laugh at history, and while I think of it here's an argument you can't beat. Did you ever see a red-headed old maid? Speak up quick now, did you?"

"Why, I—I—wait a minute till I think." For several seconds Buck ransacked a memory not too well stocked with women, in search of a solitary old maid with red hair. At length he was forced to admit defeat. "I don't seem to remember any just now, Ben," said he.

"Aha! Ain't that the answer? You don't remember any because there ain't any—there's no such animal. Red-headed grass widows are plenty, Buck, but you won't ever see a red-headed old maid. They all manage to get married somehow. That's because they know what they want and they go grab it. I can see your finish. She'll have you up before a justice of the peace with your right hand in the air, and you won't get it down till you swear to love, honor and obey her whole family—and support 'em too!"

"Gimme a chance to talk, will you?" sputtered Buck with some heat. "I ain't said anything about getting married, have I? I ain't even figuring on it."

"You bet you ain't!" said Ben. "No man figures on it. It's the other end of the sketch that does the figuring every time. Some fine evening this girl will take you for a walk and stop in front of a furniture store window. She'll show you a sign that says: 'You furnish the girl; we furnish the home. A dollar down and a dollar a week.' A fat chance you'll have after that! Anything that you might say would be used against you. . . . Oh, well, maybe it would be a good thing for you to settle down and marry this girl and raise a family and stay home nights and——"

"But ain't I told you," interrupted Buck in sudden panic, "that I'm just keeping company with her? I dunno's I'd call her a girl either. She's old enough to know her own mind. I don't like 'em when they're so awful young. All the time I've been going with her I ain't said a word that she could figure was serious. That's on the level, Ben; honest, it is!"

"You may think you haven't, Buck, but she knows better. You're probably compromised right up to your neck. You're as good as a married man this minute."

"Don't you bet no money on it!" said Buck warmly. "I'm over seven and I've been round the block several times. Nobody ain't kidnaped

me yet. Georgine's all right in a lot of ways and mighty refined for a woman that works in a soap factory, but—well, I dunno, Ben. I'm a little skittish of that till-death-do-us-part thing. A feller might live an awful long time. And he might want a change once in a while.

“Now there was ole Four-finger Simpson down in the Pecos country. He was so mean and ornery that a yeller dog wouldn't live on his ranch. He got laid up with inflammatory rheumatism so bad that he couldn't even wiggle his ears. Doc Bowen rustled round and dug up a trained nurse for him—six feet tall, she was, and would weigh about fifteen pounds to the running foot. Her face and disposition matched up with the rest of the scenario. She was every bit as easy to look at and as nice to get along with as old Four-finger himself, and I couldn't say any worse about her if I tried.

“Well, you'd never guess what she put over on Simpson. She rung in a traveling preacher and pulled a wedding ceremony on the ole coot when he was plum' out of his head. He always claimed he said 'I do' because he thought they was asking him if he wanted a drink. She didn't tell him anything about it until he was well enough to stand the shock. By that time he didn't have no more use for a trained nurse, and of course he hadn't never had no use for a wife. Ole Four-finger r'ared and pitched something awful when he found he was a sure-

enough bridegroom, but Mrs. Simpson hung on like a burr in a cinch, and finally he had to pungle up five thousand dollars to get rid of her. Then Four-finger up and died suddenlike—got as drunk as a minister's son and was kicked by a mustang—and come to find out, he'd left all the rest of his property to found a home for the indignant poor. When I come away that ole woman was wearing black for him and lawing to bust the will. The boys was betting three to one that she'd do it. Huh-uh! No wedding bells for Buck! Marriage is fine, Ben, if you can pick the right party, but with millions of women running round loose and only one out of the entire bunch the right one for you, there's an awful heavy percentage against a feller before he starts."

"Better not start then," said Leslie. "By the way, have you got to the hand-holding stage yet, Buck?"

"Not yet," said Buck; "but at that I think she'd stand for it." He heaved a gusty sigh and thoughtfully fingered a red spot on his neck where the collar had chafed him. "Georgine is certainly *some* woman!" said he slowly, and lapsed into dreamy silence, during which Leslie regarded him with mingled resentment and compassion, holding his tongue because he found no language sufficiently strong to do justice to the combination.

"I'm going to meet her this evening," resumed Buck, still in pleasant reverie. "That's

why I'm kind of dressed up a little. I'm rehearsing this collar and shirt. Georgine, she don't like soft shirts. She says they ain't refined."

"Dream on, Romeo, dream on," murmured Leslie.

"We're going to a moving-picture theater," said Buck. "Do you remember that two-reel Western thing, with Jim playing the sheriff and me in the posse, where I ride lickety-cut right up to the camera, pull ole Pieface up on his hind laigs, and light on the ground like a circus acrobat with my hat in my hand?"

"Do you mean 'The Sheriff's Pal'?" asked Leslie.

"That's the baby. It's been released and gets its first run this week. Georgine hasn't ever seen me in a picture. She's been wanting to, but I stalled her off, waiting for a Western one to come along."

"That riding stunt was about all you had to do in the entire picture," said Ben.

"I know it," said Buck. "It was a small part, but what there was of it was star stuff. Right square in front of the camera too. And with my hat off and all. She couldn't very well overlook me, eh?"

Leslie sniffed and made a clicking noise with his tongue, far more expressive than words.

"Say, Ben . . . do you think it would make any difference to her . . . being there beside

me and . . . seeing me in the picture? You know how hard women fall for actors."

"Don't let her miss it," said Ben quickly. "If she knows a real actor when she sees one, it may save your life."

Buck ignored this unkind thrust.

"I sort of figured that might make me strong with her," said he with a shameless grin.

Leslie groaned dismally and rose, prepared to abandon the field.

"Some people ain't worth saving," said he. "Go to it, Don Juan, but don't expect me to be your best man. I serve notice on you now that I won't do it."

"I ain't going to need a best man," said Buck. "Haven't I told you that she was just my lady friend? But say, Ben?"

"Well?"

"She sure is *some* woman!"

II

ON the following morning Buck was early at the studio in a soft shirt and an extremely unpleasant frame of mind. The other members of the company, coming cheerfully to the day's work, gave him light greetings and received black scowls or grunts in return.

Ben Leslie, bursting to ask questions, took one look at his friend's face and retired to the fastnesses of the property room, where he

leaned against the wall and abandoned himself to unseemly mirth.

At last Jimmy Montague came into view, walking briskly and puffing at a briar pipe, revolving great projects in his remarkable mind. To him went Buck, chin thrust forward, fire in his eyes and strutting like an enraged turkey-gobbler.

"Hello, Buck!" said the director. "How's tricks?"

"That was a fine thing that they put on at the Criterion last night," said Buck, ignoring the morning salutation. "That was a swell piece of cheese to hand the public!"

"'The Sheriff's Pal'?" said Montague. "Why, I caught it on the late run and it looked all right to me."

"Bah!" said Buck scornfully.

Now "The Sheriff's Pal" was one of Jimmy Montague's pet productions. Not only had he written the scenario and directed the making of the picture, but he had played the star part of the rascally sheriff; and played it very well, so it seemed to him. He was astonished and rather mystified at Buck's criticism.

"I thought it was pretty good," said Montague.

"Pretty good and rotten!" snapped Buck.

"Why, what was wrong with it?" asked Montague, between amazement and anger.

"It was cut all to pieces—that was what was
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wrong with it. The best stuff in it was trimmed out."

"Well, the footage ran over and we had to trim it some in spots, but I thought it got the story across all right. The audience liked it."

"Yah! A bunch of Eastern tourists! What do they know about Western stuff? You can hand them anything and they'll like it. Trimmed some in spots! I tell you, Jim, that picture was butchered in the projecting room—just butchered!"

"I don't get you, Buck," said Montague.

"Well, get me now. You remember that location stuff we did on the Verdugo road? Them chases and things?"

Montague nodded.

"You remember that scene where you had me come riding down behind the posses and do the fancy dismount?"

"Ye-es," said Montague. "I remember that. What of it?"

"Well, they trimmed it out—that's what of it! They cut that scene as much as fifteen feet. There I was, just coming in sight up the road and so far away that you couldn't tell who I was, and zip! she was cut off short! They slaughtered me in cold blood with a pair of shears. It put the whole picture on the bum."

"There goes your artistic temperament again!" smiled Montague. "It didn't hurt the picture at all, because that bit of yours didn't have any bearing on the plot. It was specu-

lar and all that, and if we hadn't been away over on the footage it would have been left in, but it wasn't necessary to the story and they trimmed it out."

"Yes, and you let Jack La Rue hog sixty feet in one scene, and all he did was load his gun and set down on a table! Fifteen feet would have saved my life, but I get trimmed out! What's the use of hiring swell Western ability if you won't feature it? There ain't another man in the business could have done that stunt any better than me!"

"Pshaw!" said the director. "You must have got up on the wrong side of the bed this morning, Buck. What do you care so long as you get your money every week? Forget it!"

"Don't you think I'll forget it! When you trimmed me out of that scene you made me a lot of trouble."

"Why, how was that?"

"Never mind how it was," said Buck darkly. And not another word would he say.

To tell the truth, Montague did not press him. He had other and more important matters on his mind, and attributing Buck's outbreak to temperament he passed on into the studio.

It was Ben Leslie who got the whole story at the price of a little sympathetic silence. Ben could be wise as a serpent upon occasions, and he knew the value of a listener to one who has need of unbosoming himself. That day was

taken up with location work, and during the lunch hour Ben smoked cigarettes with Buck under a pepper tree in Eastlake Park and waited for that which he knew could not long be delayed.

It began abruptly with a wild tirade against all directors everywhere, their heirs and assigns forever, touched with searing emphasis upon foot-hogs and favoritism, and wound up with a blistering curse laid heavily upon projecting-room experts and their assistants.

"Yes," said Ben, picking his cue deftly out of the air when Buck paused for breath, bankrupt of invective, "they cut and slash a film right and left, and the worst of it is that they never seem to know what to take out and what to leave in. They trim at the wrong place every time."

"And they don't know a real riding stunt when they see one," said Buck, and Ben, satisfied that he was fairly launched at last, rolled a fresh cigarette and nodded grave approval.

"Now take this sheriff picture, for example," said Buck. "I'd been waiting for weeks for that to come along. I'd been sort of promising Georgine a real treat. I didn't tell her what the stunt was going to be, because that would have spoiled it, and I wanted to surprise her. And there was other reasons why I wanted her to see me in that picture. You know that this town is full of cheap counterhoppers that go round telling every girl they meet that

they're moving-picture actors. It sounds big, and they get away with it until the girl gets anxious to see 'em on a film somewhere, and then they're smoked out because they can't make good.

"Now Georgine's awful wise in some ways. You can kid her along just so far and then she has to be showed. She never said nothing right out about it, but it didn't take me long to tumble that she classed me with the bogus bunch. First time I told her I was an actor she called me right off my perch.

" 'What company?' says she quick.

" 'The Titan,' I tells her.

" 'Haven't they got a film running somewhere in town?' she says. 'Let's go down on Main Street and hunt one up. I'm crazy to see you act, Mister Parvin.' "

"Smart woman," said Leslie.

"You know it! Georgine, she wasn't going to waste no time on a dead one. She'd met them conversational moving-picture people before. Well, I stalled her along and I had a tough job doing it. I might have taken her to see me in one or two pictures, but there wasn't anything worth seeing in 'em. No star stuff and no hawssback stunts. The first time that she ketched me in a film I wanted her to ketch me *right*."

"You wanted her to see you at your best," prompted Leslie craftily.

"That's the ticket, Ben—at my best. I

reckon you'd have felt the same way about it. It's natural to want to make a good impression at the go-off. I know I don't cut much ice in a soldier coat or afoot in a crowd, but gimme my chaps and put me on ole Pieface and I'm there forty ways from Sunday. Ain't I?"

"You surely are, Buck. None better."

"Well, I waited for this picture. I had it all doped out just what would happen. Here she'd be, setting beside me and waiting all through two reels, not recognizing me in any of the scenes and getting sorer and sorer all the time and making up her mind what a liar I am—see? And I'd be saying: 'Wait now, this is going to be *good*. Stick around, kid. Don't go away.' And Georgine, madder and madder every minute, would be handing it back to me strong. And she ain't like a woman that couldn't do it neither.

"Then all at once here comes someone ripping along the road like a cyclone, hitting nothing but the high spots and mighty few of them, and hanging on by one spur coming round the turn. I nudge Georgine and say: 'Get this now; watch it close!' Right to the camera this bird comes, lickety-clip, up goes ole Pie in the air, pawing with his front feet like he always does. 'Mercy!' says Georgine, 'that man will be hurt!' And zingo! there I am out in front of the whole bunch with my hat in my hand and laughing! Can you imagine how that would make her feel

—with me setting right there beside her all the time?

“I figured to give her a chance to get her breath and then I was going to lean over and whisper: ‘I’ll bet you never met that feller up there, did you? Wouldn’t know him from a side of sole-leather maybe? I reckon I can’t act at all nor ride a hawss nor nothing, eh?’ Oh, I’d thought up quite a lot of good lines to pull on her.”

Buck paused and, scooping a handful of scarlet pepper berries from the ground, began to flick them into the air. The bright light of romance faded from his eyes and his lower lip drooped. Ben Leslie remained discreetly silent, but his attitude expressed sympathy.

“That’s how I doped it to happen,” resumed Buck with a heavy sigh. “It was some little scenario, only—only the film come out of the box a blank. They trimmed my stunt out of the picture.”

“You don’t say so!”

“Just butchered me. I wouldn’t have minded that so much if it hadn’t made such a horrible sucker out of me before Georgine, after I’d been ribbing her up all the evening and promising her that she was going to see something great. She got mighty sarcastic toward the end of the first reel when she hadn’t seen hide nor hair of me in the picture.

“‘Lovely make-up you must have, Mister Parvin,’ says she. ‘Your own mother wouldn’t

know you. Are you sure that this is the company you're with and do they know it?"

"I had all I could do to keep her in the theater until my scene was due. 'Wait!' I'd say. 'You're going to be sorry for these cracks you're making at me. Stick for the big show!' "

"And then?" suggested Leslie.

"I tipped her off at the proper time," said Buck. "'Here it comes at the end of this scene,' I told her. 'Watch that road close and don't miss a bit of it!' And just as I was starting to make the ride, away off in the distance and no bigger'n a red ant, whack! off goes the film into an announcement!"

There was a long silence after this remark, delicately broken by Leslie:

"Was she—sore?"

Buck laughed, a strident cackle in which there was no mirth.

"Oh, no, not at all! She wasn't a bit sore. I only had to follow her four blocks with my hat in my hand before she'd as much as look at me, and it was an hour before she'd speak. I certainly did some tall explaining. I reckon I expounded the movie business from one end to the other. Sore? I should say not!"

"Did you finally get it fixed up?"

"Sort of. I'm on probation with her now. I can't play in her yard no more unless I show her I'm a sure-enough actor, and she says there's only one way I can do it and that's to bring her out to the studio some day and let

her see me act with her own eyes. She says she'll believe it then, but she won't never trust a film again if she lives a thousand years."

"Are you going to do it?"

"I'm going to square myself with her somehow," said Buck moodily. "You ain't got no idea how small that woman made me feel. She had me thinking I was the little end of nothing. I ain't had such a wholesale bawling-out since I was weaned. She sure tromped my pride underfoot some, Ben. Yes, I'd make good with Georgine now if it took a laig."

"What's pride amount to when you've just escaped matrimony by the skin of your teeth?" demanded Leslie impatiently. "Don't be a fool, Buck. Let the bet go as it lays."

"You can say that all right," remarked Buck, rising and stretching himself with a cavernous yawn; "but you ain't never had a bawling-out from Georgine, and I have. That woman hurt my feelings something scandalous, and I'm going to make her apologize to me if it's the last official act of my life—*sabe?* I'm going to make her say she's sorry; and then, like as not, I'll throw her down so hard that she'll bounce!"

"Look out she don't bounce into a furnished flat," warned Ben. "If a redhead can get you to forgiving her it's all off. Remember Cleopatra and Sappho and——"

"Trot 'em all out!" said Buck. "In a straightaway tongue-lashing contest I'll back

Georgine to win, hands down and on the chin-strap, from the whole darn smear. She sure is *some* woman!"

III

THE dressing-rooms at the Titan studio are situated behind the glass-walled stages where the interior scenes are photographed. A number of narrow, dingy closets extending along a gallery serve to house the wardrobes of the regular members of the company, and in the smallest of these two resplendent creatures, partially clad in court costumes of the seventeenth century, were struggling before a mirror. The gorgeous white periwigs, the satin breeches, the silk stockings, the high-heeled slippers with jeweled buckles and the lace at wrist and throat contrasted oddly with the other articles of wearing apparel scattered about the room. Chaps, woolen shirts, bandannas, sombreros, cartridge belts and boots were everywhere, for the dressing-room belonged to none other than Buck Parvin.

Charlie Jennings, a stick of grease paint in his hand, jabbed viciously at the corner of Buck's left eye. It was one of the detested duties of the assistant director to make up the extra men and such actors as could not be trusted with pigments.

"Say, hold still, can't you, Parvin? Con-
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found it, I'd rather paint an eel's face than make you up! Never mind trying to see yourself in the glass. I'll make you as handsome as possible."

Buck squirmed upon his stool in an attempt to catch a glimpse of the rhinestone buckles upon his slippers, his glance traversing a pair of rose-colored legs, satin to the knee and silk to the ankle.

"Say, Charlie, I don't look so terrible bow-laigged, do I?" he asked anxiously.

"I've seen worse, but I don't know where. You could catch a pig in an alley, all right—with the aid of a net."

"These short pants and stockings kind of show a feller up, don't they? I look pretty nifty in ordinary street stuff, but skin me down to tights and I reckon most people could tell that I've spent a lot of time in the saddle."

"Stand sideways to the camera and it won't show—much," said Jennings absently.

"I—I wasn't thinking about the camera. Say, does this pale pink look all right on me? Seems to me it's awful quiet. I like colors with some kick to 'em, colors that hit you right in the eye. Red and yellow and some shades of green. Say, don't I get one of them little patches of black sticking-plaster on my face? La Rue's going to wear one."

"You'll get all that's coming to you," said Jennings wearily. "You're a French nobleman in the picture. I don't know why Jim

cast you for one, unless it's because you're on the regular payroll and he hates to waste money."

"Do I get that patch?" repeated Buck.

"Yes, yes, yes! The Lord knows it'll take a lot of patching to make you look the part!"

"Cut it in the shape of a heart, will you?" asked Buck. "I got a reason. And say, a little more powder wouldn't hurt, would it?"

"Who's doing this?" growled Jennings. "I was handling grease paint before you ever saw a theater. When I was with Tom Keene I had to make up two and three times at every performance, and——"

"Yeh, in 'Richard the Third.' You told me about it before," said Buck hastily, forestalling a monologue on a favorite subject.

"I guess you're fixed now," said Jennings as he settled the periwig upon Buck's powdered brow. "I've done all that art can do for you. Try not to teeter so when you walk. They'd spot you for a cowpuncher the minute they saw you. Go out in the back yard and practice a while. Get used to that lace and stuff. Here! Look out for that coat! Do you want to split the back out of it? Those things cost money!"

Buck cautiously eased himself into a wonderful rose-colored garment of brocaded silk, surveyed as much of his magnificence as was visible in a square foot of mirror, and then with an inflation of the chest that threatened

the glass buttons on his flowered waistcoat he hobbled out into the sunshine, where he paced slowly to and fro rolling a brown paper cigarette and trying hard not to notice the sensation created by his appearance. After a time he lifted up his voice in song, crooning an almost forgotten classic of the varieties:

*“Aw, my baby, tell me true,
Do you love me-e-e as I love you?”*

Ben Leslie, in jumper and overalls, drew near, bowing low, with his hand on his heart.

“Greetings, Marchese, greetings! To think that I should live to see my old pal Buck with a sticking-plaster heart on his face! What’s the matter? Got a pimple?”

“Oh, get out!” grinned Buck. “How do I look?”

“About the same as you feel—darned uncomfortable.”

“Shucks! I mean do I look the part?” persisted Buck.

“You do, in spots. You resemble a marquis quite a considerable round the back of your neck.”

“But the clothes, the clothes!” said Buck impatiently. “Ain’t this a humdinger of an outfit? Ain’t there class to it?”

“Well,” said Leslie judicially, “there’s a difference of opinion about clothes. Some say they don’t make a man and some say they do,

but it's the biggest cinch in the world that they don't make a marquis. At that you might be able to get away with it if you keep your hands in your pockets and stand behind tables and things. Jimmy Montague ought to have his head examined for casting a bow-legged man in a piece of this kind. Those warped shafts of yours will register awful strong if the camera gets a look at 'em. Maybe you've got a comedy part though. In that case the worse your legs look, the better."

"My laigs seem to be troubling a lot of people round this joint," said Buck. "They suit me all right. I ain't got no fault to find with 'em. . . . Say, Ben?"

"Well."

"Remember what we were talking about last week over in the park?"

"Georgine?"

"Uh-huh. Well, she'll be here pretty soon. I'm expecting her any minute. This is the big day, Ben."

Leslie took a critical survey of his friend, beginning at the periwig, lingering long between waist and ankle and finishing with the rhinestone shoe-buckles. Then he leaned against the gallery railing and laughed himself limp—laughed until the tears came.

"Don't mind me! Enjoy yourself!" said Buck petulantly. "What's so darned funny about that, hey? La Rue's friends are always coming out to watch him do studio stuff. You

had a skirt hanging round for a month and I never said anything about it, did I? Georgine's the first woman I ever asked out here. I know this short-pants part ain't exactly in my line, but Georgine, she thinks there ain't anything like it. She seen a play once where everybody dressed like this and done a lot of sword fighting, and that's her notion of the pure quill in acting. Western stuff don't make any hit with her; she says it ain't refined. The other night I was telling her how to bulldog a steer and she pretty near fainted. Now when she sees me in this get-up she'll have to admit that I'm an actor, won't she?"

"She surely will," said Ben, wiping his eyes. "She won't know you from James K. Hackett or—— Judas Priest! Somebody left the gate open and look at the crowd pouring in! Boom! Boom! There's a battleship entering port!"

A huge overdressed Amazon came waddling resolutely across the yard. She wore an immense picture hat, burdened with scarlet flowers and nodding plumes, and her somewhat redundant figure was draped in billowy white. The sun glinted on masses of copper-bronze hair, and under the shade of heavily penciled brows bold eyes roved searchingly, taking in every detail of the unfamiliar surroundings.

"You darn fool!" ejaculated Buck. "That ain't no battleship! That's Georgine!" He hastened away to receive his guest, leaving Leslie open-mouthed and dumfounded.

“ ‘Some woman’ is right!” murmured Ben at last. “She’s forty if she’s a day and she’s big enough to lick the Mexican standing army! Poor old Buck!”

“Humph, it’s you, is it?” was Georgine’s rather ungracious greeting to her cavalier. “It’s a wonder you wouldn’t have told that person at the gate to let me in. He tried to stop me, the fresh thing, but I give him a piece of my mind.”

“Doggone it, Georgine,” said Buck contritely, “I been so busy getting dressed and made up that I forgot it.”

“That’s no excuse for putting a lady in bad,” said Georgine acidly.

“Well, I had to get into all this stuff, you know,” explained Buck. “How do you like it?”

“Turn round slow,” commanded Georgine. “No, not sideways; all the way round. M-m-m-m. That’s a right nice piece of silk in the coat, but I don’t think much of the lace. It’s imitation, and cheap imitation at that. The pants don’t fit you.”

“But take it all together,” pleaded Buck, “it ain’t so worse, is it?”

Georgine snickered.

“It might look all right on some people,” said she. “You must have been awful heavy when you was a baby or else your ma let you start walking too early. Mercy! Ain’t you simply roasting with that rats’ nest on your

head? Take me somewheres where I can set down in the shade, and get me a glass of ice water and a fan. I declare I feel's if I was about to melt."

It was a very crestfallen Buck who escorted the fair visitor into the studio and placed a chair for her in a far corner, facing the stage and behind the camera.

"You can see everything from here," said he. "I'll be back in a minute. Make yourself to home."

When Buck returned La Rue, a graceful, elegant figure in black silk, was chatting with Montague in the center of the stage.

"Say!" whispered Georgine excitedly, "ain't that the man that was in the sheriff picture? He's one of the regular actors, ain't he?"

"Yes, he's with us," said Buck carelessly. "He calls himself La Rue, but they tell me his real name is Flaherty."

"I guess he can have a stage name if he wants to," said Georgine, rolling her eyes at La Rue over the rim of the glass. "Most actors change their names. He's a handsome wretch, ain't he?"

"He thinks so," was the grim reply. "He's awfully stuck on himself."

"He's got reason to be," said Georgine calmly. "Any man with his eyes and his figure has got plenty of excuse. I'll bet he's a terrible flirt."

"He's worse than that," said Buck shortly.

"Oh, well," said Georgine, "it might not be the poor boy's fault. Most likely there's a lot of women running round after him all the time."

"Yeh, women are fools about actors, but nobody with any sense would fall for that feller."

"Oh, I don't know's I'd say that. He looks to me as if he might be right good company. He ain't married?"

"No, divorced."

"Prob'ly she didn't understand him."

"She did, though—that's why she brought suit. Say, lemme tell you a stunt he pulled a few weeks ago. We was making a Western picture and he had to ride down a steep hill and jump his hawss over a creek. It wasn't what you'd call hard. I could have done it bareback. La Rue took a look at the water and quit cold—said he had a toothache. Montague had to double him in the scene and one of the extry men made the ride, a feller fixed up to look like him."

"I'll bet they never gave you that job," said Georgine with a laugh.

"Who, me? Say, I've doubled La Rue as many as forty times!" boasted Buck.

"It must have been at a distance," said Georgine. "And I don't see why he should be taking foolish chances. Suppose he'd get hurt or something?"

"A moving-picture actor has got to be game," said Buck, "and La Rue ain't. He's

got a streak as wide as the Mississippi River!"

"You can't get me to believe that," smiled Georgine, still exasperatingly calm. "You're just jealous, that's all."

"What?" cried Buck in genuine amazement. "Jealous—of him? Why, say, he never saw the day that he could do my stuff! He ain't got the nerve to try it even! Wasn't I telling you that I was two seasons with the Bill Show, riding outlaws? Two Step, Aëroplane, Rocking Chair, Ole Steamboat—I've rode all them hawsses. There ain't many can say as much. I was——"

Georgine yawned openly.

"I wish't you wouldn't talk about yourself so much," said she. "I do despise a conceited man above all things. Oh, here comes the rest of 'em! What are they going to do now?"

The studio began to fill up with powdered gentlemen in wigs and ruffles. The stage carpenter added the finishing touches to a rich parlor setting and withdrew, mopping his brow. Buck rose hastily with something very like a sigh of relief.

"We're going to rehearse a scene," said he. "I don't know what it'll be, but I'm in it as big as a wolf. You want to watch close."

"I like the way Mr. La Rue walks," said Georgine, who had not given heed to Buck's remark. "I do believe he's the most graceful thing I ever saw. Seems to me it wouldn't be any more than polite for you to introduce him."

"He ain't the kind of a man I'd care to introduce to any of my lady friends," said Buck sternly.

Fate, which often uses the wireless telegraphy of the human eye to bring about its ends, chose this moment to strike the spark of jealous anger deep into Buck's wounded vanity. Jack La Rue, idle and mischievous, glancing casually about the studio, spied Georgine and stared hard at her. Interpreting his curiosity as an awakening interest, Georgine tossed her plumes with bovine coquetry and, if a woman weighing one hundred eighty-nine pounds can be said to simper, Georgine simpered.

"Bless me!" thought La Rue. "Buck's friend is trying to start something!"

Still holding her with his eyes, and conscious of Buck's strained attitude and sullen demeanor, the handsome leading man favored Georgine with a slow, deliberate smile.

"Well, of all the nerve!" she cooed in a delighted flutter. "Did you see that? I declare, I knew that man would flirt the minute I laid eyes on him! Oh, ain't he the rascal!"

"Well, he better not flirt with you!"

"You'd do something about it, I s'pose?"

"Yes, I'd do something about it!"

"You think you could stop him flirting with me if he really wanted to?" asked Georgine dreamily.

"I reckon I could try!" snapped Buck.

IV

"SCENE forty-two, Dupree," said Montague. "Got your background clear? I want all of the stairs and the landing above. Be careful you don't cut off Jack's head when he makes his entrance."

"All set," said Dupree.

"Now, then," said the director, addressing the male members of the company, "I want the extra men in the background. Two or three of you go over there by the mantelpiece and talk among yourselves. Never mind trying to act. Just stand naturally, chatting and laughing. Oh, yes, you might hand round the snuff-box. That's always good stuff in a costume piece. Where is that snuff-box, Ben?"

"Coming up," said the imperturbable property man.

"Jennings," continued Montague, "take three more of the extra people and be playing cards at the table. Buck, sit down here at the desk and be reading this letter. Look up, crumple the letter in your hand and register surprise and then anger. Straighten in your chair and hit the desk a rap with your open hand. You've just made up your mind to do something desperate, see? . . . Jack, that's your cue. Come across the landing and stop at the head of the stairs. All the rest of you turn and look at

him. Those of you that are sitting down get up, because he's a duke of royal blood. Buck, you get up last and face the stairs. You might be able to play a marquis with your back to the camera, and the tails of that coat will hide your legs some. Jack, you smile and bow to everybody, then come down the stairs and walk straight up to Buck with your hand held out. Give him the line: 'I congratulate you, marquis.' You look at his hand, Buck, but instead of taking it you slap him across the cheek. Not a hard slap, you understand; you're just doing it as an insult. All the rest of you jump and register great surprise when the duke gets slapped. Jack, you take a step backward and go after your sword; Jennings and his three extra men will grab you and the others will collar Buck. I don't want anybody in front of Jack in this struggle scene, because I want him to be registering surprise. Make that strong, Jack. And, remember, not too much of a struggle. This isn't 'Ten Nights in a Barroom.' These two men are gentlemen. You're all gentlemen. Don't forget it. No football tackling will go. Simply hold their arms and look shocked and drag them apart, and don't get in front of Jack's face while you're doing it. That'll be the end of the scene. We'll run through it a couple of times to get the business right. Take your places."

The action progressed smoothly to the point where Buck looked up from the letter.

"Not right into the camera!" instructed Montague. "Look beyond it. Now, then, register surprise—oh, fine stuff, Buck!"

At that moment Buck could not have registered anything but surprise had his life depended upon it. His glance, traveling beyond the camera, rested on Georgine, fair, fat and faithless. She was smiling coyly and waving a handkerchief, but, alas, for feminine constancy, her eyes were directed toward the point where La Rue was standing waiting for his cue.

"Bully!" cried Montague. "Immense! Now the anger. That's it! Hit the desk. Good work, Buck! Come on, Jack!"

La Rue strode across the landing and paused at the head of the stairs. His eyes were dancing with mischief and he bowed to the company with gay abandon.

"Up! All up!" cried Montague, and Buck was the first man on his feet. His right hand, falling at his side, knotted into a fist.

"Watch that sucker act!" crowed Dupree. "He ain't as rotten as I thought."

The duke tripped lightly down the stairs and across the carpeted floor, a mocking smile upon his face.

"I congratulate you, marquis," said he, and then, under his breath: "Who's your fat friend, Buck?"

"I'll show you!" roared Buck, and launched his fist from the hip. La Rue, taken entirely

by surprise, went down like a shot rabbit, upsetting chairs and card-table, but he was on his feet again in an instant, meeting Parvin's infuriated attack with a very workmanlike right cross which rocked that hero to the very heels. In the twinkling of an eye the entire foreground filled with silken coattails, powdered wigs, hooks, jabs, uppercuts and swings, and many a peacemaker found that it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive. Above the *mêlée* rose Buck's voice, shrill with rage:

"I'll learn you not to get gay with my girl!"

The battle, furious while it lasted, was a short one. With his own capable hands Jimmy Montague dragged his leading man back toward the camera, while a mound of arms and legs marked the spot where the extra men were struggling with Buck. It was then that a large figure in white swept majestically through the door and out into the yard.

"Call that acting?" said Georgine. "It looks more to me like a roughhouse. I ain't going to stay no place where people don't act gentlemanly!"

V

THE late marquis sat in his dressing-room contemplating a swollen nose and an angry puff under the left eye. Ben Leslie appeared to say that a piece of raw beefsteak had been ordered.

"It was worth a week's lay-off to lick that smart Aleck," said Buck. "I ain't worrying none about that. I wanted a vacation anyhow. But say, Ben?"

"Well?"

"What become of Georgine? I looked all round for her, but I couldn't find her."

"She beat it," said Leslie. "Told the man at the gate to let her out because some hoodlum had started a free-for-all."

"Some hoodlum!" repeated Buck bitterly. "That's the best I get, is it? Oh, well, Georgine she was always too refined for me. And fickle too. I reckon she'll stay sore for good this time, but if it's true about them red-headed women, maybe I'm lucky."

"Huh!" said Leslie. "You needn't have been worried about Georgine."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. Only that red hair of hers come out of a bottle. She wasn't the real article in red-heads."

There was a long silence after this remark.

"Well, anyhow," said Buck, "she was *some* woman!"

"She was that!" said Ben Leslie.

DESERT STUFF

PETE," said the editor of the Sunday supplement to his staff, "can't you bring your feature story for next week a little nearer home? Russian court scandals are all right in their way and the inside dope on the Hohenzollern family is immense, but our readers don't know these grand dukes and princes personally. See if you can't fix up something with a Southern California flavor to it. Give us a touch of that Southland stuff."

"Everybody likes to read about royalty," said the staff sulkily, who liked to write about it. He was a pale, blond youth, addicted to ready-made cigarettes, alliteration and watery eyes. "And, besides," he complained, "that slush about the Southland makes me sick."

"Sure it does," said the editor soothingly—"you and me both, Pete. It makes all the natives sick, but these Californians from Indiana and Pennsylvania like it. These hardy forty-niners from Cedar Rapids and Emporia eat it alive. We're developing a race of professional Californians, and the Southland is their Dixie.

It's a pity they haven't got a song about it so that these adopted Argonauts can stand up in the cafeterias and yell when the orchestras play it. But they read our paper and that's the answer."

"I'll see what I can do," said the staff, smiting his corrugated brow.

The mission of the Sunday supplement of a newspaper is not to instruct or to entertain, but to astound those weary souls to whom the Sabbath is a day of rest and mental relaxation. The young men who write the supplement articles are resourceful as well as clever. They have need to be, for they explain the inexplicable, invent the impossible, spin mysteries out of cigarette smoke, outride Rider Haggard and entrap the reader in a mesh of plausible fiction soberly presented as fact.

When invention fails and imagination flags, the Sunday Munchausens have recourse to the stock stories of the trade. These have been written and rewritten until they are as threadbare as a schoolmaster's coat, but like the coat they are always ready for one more public appearance after the high lights and gray shadows have been freshly touched with ink.

In such a predicament the Sunday supplementer turns to three old friends. He may discover the lost Charlie Ross once more, which is safe enough provided one locates him far beyond the circulation belt of the paper; he may unravel the mysteries surrounding the death of

the Mad Prince, or he may summon out of thin air a witness who has seen the wild camels upon the Great American Desert. And since Charlie Ross and the Mad Prince entail a trip through the files, the odds are with the wild camels.

These are without doubt the most reliably unreliable camels of which we have any record. They have driven the sea-serpent of the Atlantic coast into permanent retirement and caused the all-alive mastodon of Alaska to hide his head for shame. No man has ever seen them save with the eye of faith, yet at regular intervals they gallop through the pages of our Sabbath literature, invariably disappearing in a cloud of dust, for these camels are swift as well as wild.

No one knows what fertile brain sired these animals and gave them sanctuary upon the western boundary of Utah; it is enough to say that the wild camels, existing at first in the wilder imagination of some nameless genius of the press and nurtured by scores of imitators, are now very real to those who believe that everything in a newspaper is true.

As a matter of fact, there are no wild camels, never have been wild camels and never will be wild camels at large upon the Great American Desert, but a thousand times we have been told how they came there and why they are wild. In all probability we shall continue to receive reports of them, for they are to the Sunday-

supplement author what rags and virtue are to the melodramatist and the slapstick is to vaudeville—a sure-fire hit.

Thus Pete, smiting his corrugated brow, struck forth the spark of a brilliant idea. Something local, eh? Something with a touch of the Southland? Oh, very well. He would import the wild camels, bringing them across Nevada into California. He would locate them in the vast, sandy waste—here Pete reached for the atlas—the vast, sandy waste south of Death Valley. He would multiply their numbers, adding camel colts and a gaunt, white leader with a bell tinkling at his shaggy neck.

“I guess that’ll be poor!” said Pete to himself as he tossed a sheet of paper into the maw of his typewriter. He clattered into print as follows:

“Yesterday Thomas Smith, better known as Honest Tom, an aged desert prospector who has spent forty years of his life in search of the Peg-leg Mine, returned from a trip to the Panamint country with a marvelous tale which has caused a flare of excitement in every desert camp between”—here Pete took another look at the map—“between Yermo and Ivanpah. Mr. Smith, when seen at the residence of his sister, on Olive Street——”

And then three thousand words about the wild camels.

II

JAMES MONTAGUE, producing director for the Titan Company and author of many famous scenarios, was not a boastful man, but he often remarked that all he needed was a start.

"Plots come easy to me," he explained. "Give me the germ of an idea and I'll coax it along until I get a picture out of it. Start me to thinking along a certain line and the plot unfolds without any trouble. The tough part of it is to get started on something new."

Since the germ of the idea gave him the most trouble Jimmy sought it everywhere. Frequently the monthly magazines furnished inspiration. Montague was no pirate, and he knew too much about the copyright law to lay his company liable for damages, but he was an artist at borrowing something which the author would never miss and transforming it into something which he would never recognize. The daily newspapers also gave many valuable hints and Jimmy read them religiously.

On a Monday morning Montague arrived at the studio, brimming over with enthusiasm. He patted the office boy on the back, smiled at the telephone girl, and shouted a greeting at Buck Parvin, who was sunning himself in the back yard outside the studio.

"That means trouble," remarked Buck to Ben Leslie, the property man. "Any time Jim

comes in so brash on a Monday morning, look out. He's thought of something new and all his new stunts are hard. That feller ain't ever real happy unless he's cranking up trouble for us poor actors."

"Poor is the right word," said Leslie sarcastically, "though I don't know as I'd go so far as to say actor. If they make 'em any poorer than you are, Buck, I never saw any. Too darned bad about you overworked Thespians! You lead a dog's life for a fact; nothing to do but lay around in the sun and get fat. Now if you had my job there might be some excuse for hollering. Jim rang me up at midnight last night and roused me out of bed, and what do you think he wanted?"

Buck shook his head.

"I wouldn't undertake to say what he'd want at any hour of the day or night. Elephants, maybe?"

"Pretty near as bad," said Ben. "He wanted to know if I could get him some more camels."

"More camels!" ejaculated Buck. "Why, the jumping Jee-rusalem! There's a lot of camels over at the animal farm now. Sharkey and Ole Blue——"

"And Betsy and Mame," finished Leslie. "You'd think that would be enough camels for a mess; but no, he wants more. So he drags me out of the hay at midnight to tell me about

it. Tom Platt never ought to have had the name of the Easy Boss. Jimmy Montague is it."

"But what does he want with camels?" asked Buck. "The last time I had to do a camel stunt Sharkey stumbled and heaved me forty feet. That old feller can't get out of a walk without stepping on his upper lip. A white man was never intended to ride one of them biscuit-footed outrages, Ben."

"That's me," said Leslie. "I wouldn't keep a camel in my back yard if I had room for a steamboat. I could arrange to stand it if I never got another pleasant look from one as long as I live. Nix on that ship-of-the-desert stuff for mine."

"I'd ship 'em all to the desert if it was up to me," said Buck. "What kind of a song and dance did you give Jim?"

"What do you think? I'm the property man for this outfit, ain't I? Jim Montague says to me: 'I want this and I want that; go get 'em'—and I do. That's what I'm paid for, and Jim hasn't stumped me yet, though he's had me worried a lot of times. This was easy. 'Oh, you want some more camels?' I says, just like that. 'I can get you camels in all sizes and colors, with one hump or two humps, as preferred. Will you have 'em delivered right away?' That's what I told him."

"Yes, but you can't make good," protested Buck.

"That's where the laugh comes in—I can,"

said Ben. "Ward Brothers' Circus is wintering at Santa Monica. Billy Ward has got camels to burn, eating their heads off and doing nothing. I can get anything Billy owns, from a hippopotamus to a red bandwagon. Him and me are as close as two fingers on one hand. Oh, I can get the camels, all right. Which kind of a camel would you prefer to ride, Buck, one hump or two?"

"I wouldn't wish to ride none of 'em," said Buck. "I'd just as soon straddle the walking-beam of a ferryboat—yes, a heap sooner, because you can most generally tell where that's going. I get along with some animals first rate, but I couldn't waste any affection on a camel—not on a bet. That Selim elephant and me hit it off bully; he's almost human. I got a lot of respect for a lion. A lion has got his faults, but he's no hypocrite. He ain't your pal one minute and taking a swipe at you the next. A lion don't like you at no time whatever and you don't expect nothing from him, but a camel now, he's different. A camel has got a bad heart and a breath that would knock you down. I reckon I honeyed round that brute of a Sharkey for pretty near a month, feeding him and rubbing his nose and trying to make myself solid with him. As long as I kept my eye on him he was all right, but the first time I turned my head to spit—whoosh! and here he come. I busted the world's record for the standing jump, and I had to do it or Sharkey would have

bit my ear off. Take it from me, Ben, a camel is just as deceitful and lowdown and ornery as he looks—and that's going some."

While this discussion was taking place James Montague, in his private office, was calling the animal farm, the moving-picture menagerie owned by the Titan Company.

"Girlie, get me Tim Kelly at the animal farm," said he.

"Something doing," said the operator behind her hand to the office boy. "Maybe he's thought of a way to use those alligators that Mr. Packard bought. They'd be lovely in a picture, and new stuff too. Hello! Just a minute, Mr. Kelly."

"That you, Tim?" said the director. "This is Jim talking. I tried to get you last night. Come over right away, will you? . . . Yes, a new animal stunt. . . . As soon as you can, then."

Ben Leslie was next summoned from the property room.

"How soon can you get those camels?" asked Montague.

"Any time," said Ben. "How many do you want?"

"All I can get."

"Nothing could be clearer than that," said Leslie calmly. "I'll get you camels till you can't rest. What's the stunt?"

"I'm going to make a real desert picture. We've been fooling along, using a dry river-

bed and a sandpile for a desert and getting away with it, when we might just as well give 'em the real thing, with the desert itself for a background. I've got a picture in mind that'll have a lot of scenery in it, and when I get through I dare anybody to say that it wasn't made in the Sahara. We can ship a couple of carloads of camels to one of the little desert towns, hop out and make the stuff and be back inside of three days. It won't cost much, but we'll get a desert picture that will have atmosphere and color and—all that stuff. By the way, Ben, where are you going to get those camels? From Ward's circus?"

"Sure thing. Billy Ward has got a whole slew of camels—more camels than anything else. Did you ever see that big white dromedary that leads the bunch in the street parade? That's old Aladdin, and take it from me he's some camel."

"A white camel!" exclaimed Montague. "You don't say so!"

"But I do say so. Maybe they doped him up with peroxide or something, but he's the whitest camel you ever saw."

"That's a queer coincidence," said Montague. "Look at this."

He drew out a copy of the Sunday supplement of a local paper and spread it open upon the desk. The artist, collaborating with Pete, had produced a riot of camels across seven columns, and the flying leader was an immense

white brute with a single hump. Above the illustration was a flaring line in large type:

GUIDED BY GHOSTLY LEADER
WILD CAMELS INVADE THE SOUTHLAND

“Holy cat!” ejaculated Leslie. “If that ain’t a ringer for old Aladdin I’ll eat him!”

“Do you think Billy Ward will let us have him?”

“Of course. He’ll come in mighty handy too, because these circus camels have been trained to follow him just like sheep. Wherever Aladdin goes the bunch will go. That’ll save you a lot of trouble.”

“Lovely!” said Montague. “Think of the effect we can get with a silhouette run, pulled off against the skyline, that old white fellow in front and all the others trailing him! We can use a telescopic lens and catch ’em as far away as a mile. That’ll give us a chance to ring in a big stretch of desert for a foreground. Stain the film for a sunset glow and that’ll be poor, eh?”

“It ought to make a swell picture,” said Ben, “but there’s one thing you mustn’t overlook. Somebody has got to ride Aladdin, and you’d better pick the right man for the job. Jack La Rue is all right on a horse, but he’s pretty rough with livestock, and a camel won’t stand to be yanked round the way Jack yanks a horse. Billy Ward was telling me about Aladdin; he’s

awful touchy, and they have to handle him just so or he gets peeved and won't work. Far be it from me to butt in, Jim, but Billy Ward is going to hold me responsible for those camels and particularly Aladdin. Billy thinks more of that old white rascal than anything in the show, and he'd never forgive me if something happened to him. If you let La Rue do the riding he'll get impatient, the way he always does, and boot Aladdin in the slats a few times, and the first thing you know there'll be camels scattered forty ways and it won't be any picnic to round 'em up again. If it was up to me, Jim, I'd put the best rider in the company on Aladdin."

"How about Buck?" asked Montague.

"That's the man I'd pick," said the treacherous Leslie.

"I'll fix it up," said the director, eager to be at work upon the new scenario. "You go and make arrangements with Billy Ward. We'll pay him anything in reason, but we must have that white camel. If he wants to send his own animal man along he can. Better dig up a few camel saddles while you're about it, and if Ward has got any Arab costumes, grab 'em."

"They're as good as grabbed," said Ben. "I'm off."

"What's the dope?" asked Buck, following Leslie into the property room.

"I don't know what the picture is going to

be," said Ben, "but if you'll show me your hand I'll tell your fortune."

"Shoot!" grinned Buck, extending his palm.

"Ah! See this line here? That's a journey, Buck. You're going away from here—on a railroad train. Somewhere on the trip you'll meet an animal. . . . It looks like a camel. . . . By golly! It *is* a camel. . . . A white camel with a black heart and one hump. . . . I see you riding that camel, Buck. . . . My, oh, my! Look at all those little crisscross wrinkles! They mean trouble. You won't like that camel and he won't like you. You'll have an accident. You and that white camel are going to get into a jam of some kind——"

"You see these?" demanded Buck, doubling up his fist and patting his knuckles. "See these four little lumps? They mean trouble, too, and you're going to run your eye into 'em if I find out that you've framed this camel thing on me. You big long-legged scarecrow! I reckon you and Jim put your heads together and fixed up a job."

"Nothing like that," said Leslie. "It's fate for you and that white camel to meet. Furthermore, I'll state that I know that camel personally and he's the meanest camel that ever dipped his face into a bale of hay. The man who takes care of him wears shinguards and a baseball mask."

"Is that on the square?" asked Buck anxiously.

"Everything is on the square but the camel, and he never was on the square in his life. You ask any circus man about Aladdin. They all know him. The old sucker has got a reputation for pure cussedness that reaches from one end of the country to the other."

"He's bad, is he?"

"Bad? Why, say, a Bengal tiger is a gentleman and a scholar and a sucking dove beside him! You're always blowing about what a great rough rider you are, and here's where you show me. If you take my tip you'll wear a suit of armor and put shock absorbers in your hip pockets."

"Uh-huh," said Buck slowly. "I get you on the shock absorbers, but why the armor, Ben?"

"Oh, nothing, only this Aladdin bites like a wolf."

There was an ominous silence, during which Buck rolled a cigarette. When he spoke his voice was soft as silk and his manner almost apologetic.

"You been kind enough to tell me what's going to happen to me," said Buck, "so I'll tell you what's going to happen to you. If this camel friend of yours bites me and I find it out you get some shock absorbers fitted to your jaw-bone because that's where you'll need 'em. As to my riding, I don't know as I blow so terrible much. I claim I can set up in the middle of anything that has to light on the ground once in a while. I'll ride this Aladdin camel, you

can bet on that, but if he bites me watch out for yourself. And if you think anything of him at all you better breathe it in his ear that it won't be healthy for him to grab no free lunch off Buck Parvin. As a general thing I aim to be kind to dumb animals, but a feller has got to draw the line somewhere, as Doc Bowen said when he found the skunk in his kitchen. Being camel-bit is the extreme tip of the limit with me, and if your friend Aladdin starts anything coarse I'll whang him over the head with the butt of my gun. Yes, I'll hang a couple on his eyebrow that he won't be able to wipe off in a hurry. And after I've learned him manners I'll run you plumb breathless for wishing him on to me. You *sabe* that, *amigo?*"

III

THE Occidental Limited, eastbound from Los Angeles to Chicago, clicked over the rails at an average speed of forty miles an hour, a wheeled palace flying through the heart of the desert. The lone tourist on the observation platform stared at the two shining lines of steel, rippling away toward the horizon straight as the leveled finger of God. On either side of the roadbed there was nothing but sand and sagebrush, sloping gently upward to the distant mountains, grim, saw-toothed ridges of rock, bare and brown and without a sign of verdure.

"What a frightful country!" sighed the tourist.

"Huh!" said the brakeman. "You ought to see her in July."

"I don't believe I'd care to," said the tourist, rising. "Have you read the Sunday paper?"

"Saw it this morning," said the brakeman.

The tourist threw his newspaper overboard and went inside to get a cooling drink. We need not follow him, our business being with the newspaper, settling to rest in the sand beside the track.

Three days later a wrinkled little old man passed that way, urging a pair of heavily laden burros before him.

"Well, well!" he cackled, slapping his knees. "Look here, Jimmy, at what we've found! A newspaper as sure as you're born! Ain't been here long or it would have got sunburned. Yes, sir, it's fresh! Somebody must have throwed it off the train. You reckon they knew we'd be along about this time? We'll have to read all about what's going on outside, won't we, Jimmy? Yes, sir, you sure said an armful then; we'll read her from kiver to kiver. Ain't she a whopper though? Colored pictures too. Don't it beat the Dutch how they think up things to fill the newspapers, Jimmy? Don't it though?"

Still mumbling and talking to himself, the old man thrust the paper in among his cooking utensils and prodded his shaggy little beasts

into motion. His course was not a direct one, for he picked up bits of rock here and there and made wide détours to examine every new gully worn by the winter rains, for Uncle Jimmy Belcher was a prospector.

The desert, they say, claims one man out of every three who visit it. There is an indefinable charm in its far horizons and crystal-clear atmosphere, a mysterious lure in its wonderful starlit nights. Little by little the desert absorbs the chosen one and, when it has put its seal upon him, forgets him, for he is safe. He will never be content anywhere else and if he "goes inside" he will be forced to return. He is a desert rat for life.

Uncle Jimmy Belcher was seventy years old, but he looked younger in spite of his wrinkles and sun-dried appearance. His limbs were still spry and every tooth in his head was sound.

"How come I ain't lost no teeth," said Uncle Jimmy once when questioned upon the subject. "Because I scour 'em with gunpowder twice a week reg'lar as clockwork. That's a trick I learned from the Sioux Injuns when I was soldierin' on the plains with old Crook. You never see an Injun with the toothache, did ye? No, and you won't either. And then I use a plenty of eating tobacker and that preserves the gums."

Uncle Jimmy made an early camp. He unpacked his burros, built a fire of sagebrush and set about preparing his evening meal. As he

was squatting over the frying-pan, watching the bacon, the faint yelp of a coyote floated down from the hills, each quavering note as distinct as the trill of a meadow-lark. Uncle Jimmy shook his fist at the gathering darkness.

"Oh, I knowed you was out there somewhere!" he said with the air of one resuming an ancient controversy. "I was expecting you to tune up about now. You ain't fooled me none. You and your grandfathers before you have been a-setting round watching me nights and singing to me, but you ain't got me yet and you never will. I'm going to fool you. I ain't going to die on the desert; I'm going to die in a bed, I am, and be planted six feet deep in a sure-enough graveyard. Then what'll you do, hey? Sing, you son-of-a-gun! I hear ye!"

After supper Uncle Jimmy piled fresh fuel on the fire, spread his blankets and settled himself to read the newspaper. The colored cover of the Sunday supplement attracted his attention and he turned the pages to look at the pictures.

"Hello!" he said. "Jimmy, them are camels, ain't they? Why, sure they're camels! Is it a circus maybe? We'll have to look into this!"

He began to read, spelling out the long words, and a puzzled frown nested between his bushy eyebrows.

"This is coming pretty close home, Jimmy," he muttered. "Yes, sir, pretty close home. 'Thomas Smith, better known as Honest Tom,

an aged desert prospector.' Honest Tom—we don't know no such feller as that, do we? There's Shorty Smith and Baldy Smith—— Hold on! Baldy's dead. And ole Zack Smith; we know all them, Jimmy, but Honest Tom—— No, he's surely a new one on us! And it says he's been here forty years! Well, ain't that sing'lar! If we hadn't seen it in the paper we never would have believed it, would we, Jimmy? No, I reckon not. We thought we knew all the old-timers too. Just goes to show what a mighty big place this desert is. Room enough for all. Oh, well, maybe he hung out up round Moharvey."

A few moments later Uncle Jimmy grunted aloud and moved closer to the fire. This is what he read:

How long Mr. Smith slept he does not know. He found himself sitting bolt upright beside the ashes of his camp fire, his revolver in his hand. The sky was filled with drifting clouds. The moon had risen and the faraway mountain peaks were flooded with silver. The desert itself was bathed in a soft mellow light, so strong that a moving object was plainly visible at a distance of one hundred yards——

"Hah!" said Uncle Jimmy. "Been on the desert forty years and can't see no further than that—by moonlight? We could see a horny toad turn over as far off as that the darkest night

that ever shone, couldn't we, Jimmy?" He returned to his reading:

Sitting thus, with every nerve strained and every faculty alert, Smith became aware of a faint tinkling sound as of a bell at a great distance. Turning his head to the east he made out a white object which seemed to be moving in his direction. The white object came nearer and Smith was able to distinguish several dark ones behind it. There was no sound save the faint tinkling of the bell. The prospector's first thought was of strayed cattle, but he soon dismissed that explanation as improbable.

Swinging steadily forward at an even gait, the ghostly leader bore down upon Smith's camp. Towering gaunt and spectral in the half-light, it might have been a creature from another world. There was menace in its silent advance, a threat in the shadowy shapes which trooped behind it.

The moon passed behind a cloud, and when it shone out again in all its brilliancy a gigantic white camel loomed above the ashes of the fire. Smith declares that the brute was so close that he saw the whites of its eyes and the tiny silver bell around its neck.

Another stride and the prospector would have been crushed, but the instinct of self-preservation intervened. Leaping to his feet, Smith emptied his revolver in the air. With a snort and a bellow the white camel veered to the

south, disappearing at incredible speed. The other camels followed their leader and Smith narrowly escaped death under the flying hoofs of the frantic creatures. Long after the desert had swallowed them up he heard the tinkling of the bell. . . . Smith says that he did not count the camels, but, judging by the tracks in the sand, he is convinced that there were no less than thirty full-grown animals in the herd.

Uncle Jimmy dropped the paper and drew a long breath.

“Goshamighty!” he said. “Thirty full-growed camels all in a bunch! Running loose and rampaging round nights too! Why, Jimmy, it’s getting so that it’s dangerous to be safe, ain’t it? Don’t you reckon we better go hobble them jacks so they won’t get stampeded? Yes, sir, let’s go do that very thing! Camels on the desert! Seems to me the Gover’nment had some of ’em down in Arizony once. Maybe it’s the same bunch, but how in thunder did they get across the Colorado River! Hey? S’pose they do come hiking along, are we a-going to lay still like a hoptoad and let a white camel tromp the eternal gizzard out of us? Not if we see him first, we ain’t. That would be a fine finish, wouldn’t it? The coyotes would get us for sure, then, wouldn’t they, Jimmy? Yes, they would for a fact. Are we going to be run over by a whole damn circus parade and not have nothing to say about it? We’re just full

of them tricks, ain't we, Jimmy? We'd begin shooting before that, wouldn't we? Why, to be sure! And we didn't shoot none in the air when we was with old man Crook, did we?"

Three hours later the old man was still mumbling by the fire, but he was not reading the paper. He was polishing an ancient service revolver, which he patted lovingly and addressed as "Sitting Bull."

"Now, then, let 'em bring on their white camels!" said he as he slipped the heavy weapon back in its holster. "Let 'em come any hour of the day or night and we're hooked for 'em. Are we going to be run out of this country by a stray menagerie? No, sir; we was here first, wasn't we, Jimmy? We ain't a-going to be stampeded by nothing, not while old Sitting Bull can spit a mouthful of lead!"

He stretched himself upon his blankets and closed his eyes. Once more the unseen coyote lifted his querulous plaint.

"Yes, I s'pose you're in with 'em," murmured Uncle Jimmy sleepily, "but it won't get ye nothing. The camel that tries to ketch us asleep better not wear no bell. You wait round a while and you'll find out how camel meat tastes!"

IV

A SPECIAL train of three cars twisted its way up the Cajon Pass, the big ten-wheeler coughing

over the steep grade. One of the cars was a Pullman sleeper; the others bore the red and gilt of Ward Brothers' Circus.

In the Pullman the members of the Titan Company amused themselves in various ways. Myrtle Manners, the leading woman, read a novel and munched chocolates. Jack La Rue, the leading man, scowled out of the window at the scenery and said unflattering things about realism when carried to extremes. Charlie Dupree, the camera man, pretended to listen to him, but was really much more interested in a take-up box that needed repairing. In the drawing room, with the door locked against intruders, Jimmy Montague, author, director and sometimes actor, wrestled with his desert scenario, a delicate little figment of the imagination introducing love, jealousy, treachery, hate, and a few other human emotions besides battle, murder, sudden death and camels, but particularly camels. At the other end of the car a lively poker game was in session. Buck Parvin, shin in his hands and an unlighted cigarette depending from his lower lip, watched the shifting chips apathetically.

"Why don't you set in and do yourself some good?" asked Ben Leslie.

"I couldn't pay the first installment on a postage stamp."

"Broke! What did you do with that fifty-dollar bonus?"

Buck yawned and stretched.

“Easy come, easy go, as the soldier boy said when he blowed his month’s pay in one night—the whole thirteen bucks.”

“Did you see that white camel?” inquired Ben.

“Uh-huh. I give him the once-over when they loaded him into the car. You’ve been slandering that ole boy. He went aboard like a lamb.”

“He always does,” said Ben, “but that ain’t saying he’ll unload like one. Has Jim told you anything about the stunt yet?”

Buck nodded and lighted his cigarette.

“I’m the fair-haired boy in this picture,” said he. “I got the part of the villain. So far as I can make out from what Jim tells me, I’m jealous of La Rue. That’s why I steal the camels and leave Jack and Myrtle afoot in the desert and forty miles from water. Jim has got a fool notion about using a telescope lens and getting a picture of me beating it, with the entire bunch strung out behind single file. It can’t be done. How am I going to herd them camels in a straight line, I ask you?”

“That’ll be easy,” said Leslie. “Just ride Aladdin and the others will follow.”

“Well, I’ll ride him all right,” said Buck boastfully. “He don’t look like no Bengal tiger to me.”

“Wait,” said Ben quietly. “He hasn’t started yet.”

“He better not start with me,” remarked

Buck. "I got my ole smoke-pole along and the first time Mr. Aladdin gets fresh—whang! right on the crust. I'll tame him or cave in his roof!"

Daggett is a sleepy little town on the edge of the desert, where sensations are few and far between. The arrival of the Titan special was a great event to the elderly gentlemen sun-drying themselves in front of the general store, and several of them mustered up sufficient ambition to walk across to the sidetrack where the camels were being prodded down a cattle chute into a corral.

"Is this a circus, mister?" asked one of them.

"Not yet," said Ben Leslie, his eye upon Aladdin, who was being coaxed down the chute by Tim Kelly and three men from the animal farm. "Not yet, but stick around, old timer. The show is liable to start at any time."

A weatherbeaten native stood beside the corral, leaning his elbows upon the top rail. He was industriously chewing tobacco and the movements of his jaw were communicated to his patriarchal white beard, which hung down inside the fence, waving gently like a flag of truce.

Aladdin, his feet on solid ground once more, blew a long whistling breath through his nostrils and sidled along the barrier, soft-footed as a cat, the very picture of innocence. As he came abreast of the tobacco chewer his white neck darted out with the speed of a striking snake, there was a flash of yellow teeth, a sav-

age click and the native leaped backward with a scream in which acute pain, astonishment and rage were mingled. Aladdin continued on his way, his eyes half closed as if in meditation. Several wisps of white hair hung from the corner of his mouth.

"Where's the town marshal?" howled the outraged citizen. "That there white cam-u-el bit the whiskers right off my face! I'll sue your show for damages!"

"Ye'll sue nothing," said the alert Tim Kelly. "Kape yer whishkers on the right side of the fence. Ye had no business tor-r-mentin' the poor dumb baste wid the sight of so much al-falfa!"

The laugh which this sally raised was short lived. A terrific hubbub arose in one corner of the corral. Aladdin had discovered Sharkey and was resenting the latter's presence with every means at his command. The animal farm attendants leaped into the squealing, bubbling mêlée and at last succeeded in forcing Aladdin into a neutral corner, where he remained quivering with rage. Buck Parvin was a pop-eyed spectator.

"Thunder and guns!" he murmured. "He pulled enough whiskers out of that old guy's face to stuff a sofa pillow!"

"Yes, and he came within an ace of getting his nose," said Ben Leslie pleasantly. "Did you bring that suit of armor?"

"No," said Buck, "I didn't, but I've got

something just as good." He patted a suspicious bulge over his right hip. "If you think I'm going to let that white hyena bite me and get away without a receipt for it you're crazy. Acting is one thing, but being cannibalized by a camel is another. I declare myself right now, and it goes too. If that brute bites me I'll get him!"

"You better not hurt that camel," warned Leslie.

"Huh!" grunted Buck. "Put it the other way round. That camel better not hurt me."

V

AN hour later a strange procession passed down the single street and out into the desert, headed by James Montague and Jack La Rue, the former in his shirtsleeves and the latter in a flowing white burnoose and sandals. Most of the actors appeared in costume, but Buck Parvin carried his burnoose over his arm and his sandals in his pocket.

Behind the members of the company came the camels, escorted by Tim Kelly and his assistants from the animal farm, also in burnoses. Aladdin stalked in front, a competent hand upon his bridle, and a rickety express wagon brought up the rear, loaded with "props." Ben Leslie was on the seat with the

driver. Behind the wagon trooped the entire population of Daggett, silent and curious.

"Look here, Jim, do I work with that white camel?" demanded La Rue.

"You don't have to ride him, if that's what you mean; but he's in some scenes with you."

"Those scenes will have to be cut out," said La Rue with firmness.

"What's the matter now, Jack? More artistic temperament?"

"No, common sense. That white camel is vicious, Jim. You saw what he did to that old man. You haven't any right to ask an actor to take a chance with a savage brute like that. Suppose he disfigures some one for life?"

"But he won't bite you," soothed Montague.

"That camel will bite anybody!" snapped the leading man. "I'll quit the company before I'll work in a scene with him. I don't want to get my chin bit off, Jim."

"But, confound it, we've got to use him!" stormed Montague. "He's the bull-cow of the herd. They'll all follow him!"

"They will, eh?" La Rue stopped and tossed the hood of his burnoose back over his shoulders. "Wait a second, I've got an idea."

"It'll die of lonesomeness," was the sarcastic rejoinder.

"See how this strikes you," urged La Rue. "The way the picture is doped out now, Buck is one of our own people and he gets up in the

night and steals the camels out of jealousy. That's always good stuff for a heavy, but it doesn't make enough use of the white camel. Why not have Buck a sort of a desert thief? He owns this white camel, see? The brute has a peculiar influence over other camels—they follow him the same as if they're hypnotized. Buck knows about this white camel's power, and——”

“I've got it!” cried Montague, suddenly inspired. “You've struck a great idea there and you don't know what to do with it. It'll change the whole picture, but it's worth it. I'll play the heavy—Buck can't do it. He can double me in the riding scenes. I'm a Bedouin chief, sort of an outlaw. Poor as Job's turkey, but I've got this white camel. You're a rich trader and we're both in love with Myrtle. I steal the camels from your caravan because I want to get you out of the way—want you to die on the desert. I come riding by at night on my white camel and your camels get up and follow him. Great moonlight effect there—film stained blue—camels kneeling in the foreground—tents behind them—lovely! In the morning you start out with your party to walk to the nearest water—we'll have to dope out some excuse for your not having any. Oh, yes, I can empty the barrels before I steal the camels. We'll make a lot of scenes of you and Myrtle on the desert, after the others have all died one by one. You get weaker and weaker and finally

give up in despair. Then we cut to the tents again. I come back on foot to see how much merchandise has been left behind. On the ground I find a shawl—the same one that I give Myrtle in an earlier scene. See the punch developing, Jack? I didn't know that Myrtle was with you and all at once I realize that in trying to put you out of the way I've condemned her to death as well. A great chance for some real acting there, what? I go crazy with grief and the old R. E. Morse thing and rush out on foot to find her."

"Why all this 'on-foot' stuff?" asked La Rue suspiciously.

"For the sake of the finish! I find you in the nick of time; I see that you're the one she loves. Big renunciation scene. I give you my water bottle and her my farewell blessing and die of thirst while you make a getaway with the girl. How's that?"

"Fine—for you!" growled La Rue. "That ain't a heavy; that's a lead. I give you the idea and you hog the picture!"

Montague did not hear him. He was already dismantling his scenario and rebuilding it along other lines.

"The first thing we'll make is the silhouette run," said Montague to Tim Kelly. "I want to test the camels on this following stunt. That ridge over there is the very place to pull it."

"Good enough," said the chief animal man,

“but I misdoubt whether our camels will follow this white man-eater.”

“We’ll have enough without our four,” said Montague.

The saddling of Aladdin was not accomplished without bloodshed. One of the attendants relaxed his vigilance for an instant and suffered a painful nip on the shoulder.

“Aisy!” said Tim Kelly. “I’ve been told that Billy Ward starves his livestock and I believe it.”

“Now, Buck,” said Montague, “I want you to ride over about half a mile and then turn and go straight along that ridge against the skyline. The other camels will follow, so you won’t have to worry about them. I’ll keep these people back out of the way so there won’t be anybody within half a mile of you to make Aladdin nervous. Take your time about it and finish with a run.”

“I’ll do my best, Jim,” said Buck, whose eyes were fixed upon the attendant’s shoulder; “but I warn you, if this camel bites me his name is mud. I’ll get him sure!”

“Rats! You talk like a child! Keep your legs back out of the way and he can’t hurt you.”

“The deuce he can’t!” sneered Buck. “He’s got a neck made out of rubber!”

“All set!” said Tim Kelly. “The noble ship o’ the desert is ready to sail.”

Three men held Aladdin’s head while Buck

swung himself between the high horns of the camel saddle and thrust his sandals into the stirrups.

"Better say good-by to us, folks," he called. "One of us might not come back. Leggo of his head. Hup, you!"

Aladdin heaved himself to his feet with a racking series of convulsions, whistled through his nostrils, shook his head from side to side, made a futile though earnest attempt to reach one of Buck's knees and then lumbered forward, the circus camels following in his wake.

"Fine!" said the director. "Charlie, be ready to catch 'em as soon as they straighten out along the ridge. Get as much of the foreground as you can and mighty little sky."

"Even so," said the camera man.

"Buck doesn't seem to be having any trouble," remarked Montague. "It's the first time I ever knew him to kick about a riding stunt. Said he'd kill the camel if he got bit."

"Oh, well," said Leslie reassuringly, "you know how Buck is. He wouldn't hurt a fly, but he likes to talk."

The string of camels grew small in the distance, turned at a right angle and swung up the ridge, the white leader plodding along at a sedate pace.

"That's the stuff!" said Montague. "They ought to be moving a little faster than that though. Why doesn't he hurry 'em up a little?"

Evidently the same idea occurred to Buck,

for he was seen to flap his elbows and kick Aladdin violently in the ribs. The white neck curved backward in protest and at the same instant the camel made a mighty leap, lurched in his stride and fell headlong. Before his knees crumpled under him the other camels were in full flight, and the wind bore the short, crashing report of a heavy revolver.

"He shot him! Buck shot him!" yelled Ben Leslie, starting to run.

The population of Daggett surged forward like a wave.

"Out of the picture! Keep out of the picture!" bellowed Montague.

"Too late," said the imperturbable Dupree. "Ben spilled the beans. He cut across in front just as the camels started to scatter."

All things considered, it was a very complete case of circumstantial evidence.

Ben Leslie and Jimmy Montague, distancing the field and finishing a stride apart, found Aladdin dead upon the ground with a ragged hole in the side of his head. Buck Parvin, a trifle white about the lips, was sitting beside the body of the camel, examining an ugly wound below his right knee.

"You fool! What did you shoot him for?" panted Leslie.

"Me?" said Buck blankly. "I never did no such thing! I was booting him to make him run and he reached round and took a chunk out of

my leg. Just as he got me—Pow! and down he goes like a landslide! I lit on my head and was sort of knocked silly for a minute, and when I came to I looked all round, but I couldn't see a thing. That's straight goods."

Montague shook his head.

"It sounds fishy to me. You said you'd do it if he bit you. Let me see that gun!"

Buck handed over his weapon with a sickly grin.

"Jim," said he, "I was only bluffing about that; honest, I was. I'm telling you right; I didn't shoot him and I don't know who did."

By this time the audience was arriving. The citizens of Daggett surrounded the dead camel and filled the air with ejaculations and profane comment.

"He said one of 'em mightn't come back!"

"Don't look like he'd bite anybody else in a hurry."

"Deader'n a nit!"

"Camels is expensive critters, ain't they?"

"Been me, I'd just banged him on the head with the butt. No need to kill him. Shame, I say!"

"Loaded with cartridges," said Montague, "and one empty."

"Well, I can explain that," said Buck, looking about him at a circle of accusing faces. "I loaded her because I thought I might get a shot at a coyote or something. When she's loaded I always carry her with the trigger on

an empty. She's safest that way. Jim, on the level, you don't think I shot that poor ole camel, do you? Ben, you know I wouldn't do a trick like that, no matter how bad he bit me. I was just talking, that's all; I——"

"There's no need for you to talk any more, Parvin," said the director. "You've killed an animal that was worth a lot of money and you've ruined a fine picture. You're through, so far as working with this company is concerned."

"Canned, am I?" Buck rose and stripped off the burnoose, which he threw on the ground at Montague's feet. "Seems to me, Jim, we've worked together long enough for you to give me the benefit of the doubt. No?"

He laughed recklessly.

"Oh, well, it's all in a lifetime, I reckon. The truth ain't good enough for some people. You might do me one favor though: Keep that gun till you get cooled out and sensible, and then let any of these old-timers tell you whether she's been fired lately."

Montague turned on his heel without a word or a look.

Buck was left alone with Aladdin. He looked down at the sprawling legs and the grotesquely twisted neck and shook his head.

"You poor ole son-of-a-gun!" said Buck. "I didn't like a bone in your head and I talked rough to you, but I wouldn't have bushwhacked you like this!"

VI

THE desert moon shone down on two men sitting upon a baggage truck in front of the depot.

"It's too good an idea to waste," said Montague. "Of course it won't be quite as effective without the white camel, but the picture can be worked out some other way. It's up to us to make as much as we can out of the trip. What do you think Ward will soak us for Aladdin?"

"Enough," said Ben Leslie, "and he'll probably want to kill me. Billy thought a lot of that white camel."

"Have you seen Buck?"

"Yes. He's down at the saloon, telling his troubles and waiting for the midnight train. I lent him ten dollars and then he offered to kick me."

"Still denying it, is he?"

"Absolutely! That was why he wanted to fight. You know, Jim, it ain't like Buck to lie, and he sticks to it that somebody else fired the shot."

"No chance!" said Montague. "Didn't he say he'd kill the camel if he bit him? Didn't he have an empty shell in his gun? If anybody else was round there, why didn't we see him?"

"Good evening, gentlemen!" piped a thin voice. A small figure approached, coming from the direction of the corrals. "Here's Uncle

Jimmy back again! The coyotes ain't got him yet and they never will—— Oh, excuse me! I didn't notice you was strangers!"

"That's all right," said Leslie carelessly. "How're you making it?"

"Fair," said Uncle Jimmy. "Fair to middlin'. Can't complain. I still got my jacks and my outfit, and that'll be enough to bury me when the time comes. Just got back from a trip. I see they captured them wild camels; got a whole corral full of 'em over yonder."

"Wild camels?" said Montague, suddenly interested.

"Why, yes, wasn't you readin' about them wild camels in the newspapers?" The little old man cackled and slapped his knees. "By jocks, they never would have got 'em if it hadn't been for me! Yes, sir, they got Uncle Jimmy to thank for that job!"

Ben Leslie nudged Montague.

"What job was that?"

"Why, rounding up them camels," said Uncle Jimmy, sitting down upon the baggage truck. "You see, I was warned about 'em. Out here about a week ago I picked up a newspaper and there was a whole page in it about them camels. It seems they had a leader, a big white feller, and he used to roam round nights trying to find somebody to tromp on. Come awful clost to getting a feller named Tom Smith. I knowed there was only one thing to do and that was to keep my eye peeled for that

white camel, him being the leader and havin' it in for prospectors, as you might say. I was afraid he'd come loping along some night, flatten me out like a flapjack and leave me for the coyotes. I got so I'd set up waiting for him, but nothing come of it.

"When I got pretty clost to town I figgered that I was safe and sort of forgot about them wild camels. This afternoon I was out here a ways, the other side of a little rise of ground, following up some float. My jacks was over about a mile away in a draw. All of a sudden I heard a noise and I looked up—I was on my hands and knees, gentlemen—and there was that white camel right on top of me! Yes, sir, and what's more there was a ghost ridin' him—I seen him as plain as I see you."

"And so you're the——" Montague stopped, for Leslie nudged him again.

"Don't you see he's crazy?" whispered Ben. "Let him talk! Go on, old-timer. You saw the camel and the ghost riding him. What did you do then?"

"Why, gentlemen," said Uncle Jimmy, "I grabbed for ole Sitting Bull—that's the gun I had when I was fightin' Injuns with Crook—and I cut her loose and down he came like a thousand of brick. I don't rightly know what happened after that because it just rained camels all round me. There must have been a million of 'em and they come from everywhere! I knowed they was after me for shooting that

white leader, and I bet no jackrabbit could have out-run me gettin' away from there. Yes, sir, I certainly sifted some sand——”

Ben Leslie chuckled and leaped from the truck, disappearing in the direction of the saloon. Uncle Jimmy paused, startled.

“I might have knowed nobody would believe me,” said he. “But I didn’t dream it, else how come they to have a whole corral full of camels over yonder? And the thing that gets me is where did all them people come from so quick? I looked back once and——”

Sounds of argument came out of the darkness.

“You leggo my arm, Ben Leshlie!” said a thick voice. “You ain’t no frien’ of mine! You said I shot poor ol’ ’Laddin—you said it and Montague said it. I never hurt dumb animal my whole life! Leggo my arm!”

“It’s all right, Buck!” Ben’s voice rang out cheerfully. “You didn’t shoot him; it was an old nut of a prospector. We’ve got him over here at the depot.”

“Wha—wha’s that?” roared Buck, immediately militant. “You got him—fell’r shot ’Laddin? Killed that ol’ white camel? Where is he? Show’m to me, Ben! We’ll fix him!”

Uncle Jimmy Belcher slid off the baggage truck with surprising agility for one of his ripe years and backed swiftly away into the shade of the depot building, fumbling at his hip. Buck, coming up at a run and being in no condition

to distinguish friend from foe, hurled himself upon Montague with a triumphant whoop.

"Here he is! Fetch a rope, Ben! Doggone you—you won't—murder no more—movin' pitcher—camelsh!" And at every other word he banged Montague's head upon the baggage truck.

Uncle Jimmy Belcher, pausing at the far end of the freight shed, heard the request for a rope and the uproar which followed it. He did not linger, but slipped inconspicuously round the corner and faded away in the direction of the corrals, Sitting Bull unlimbered for immediate action.

"Too darn much going on round here to suit us, Jimmy!" he wheezed. "What say we git our jacks and leave this fool town flat on its back? Yes, sir, let's do that! Too many camels and eediots in Daggett this evening! You reckon we better hurry some? Why, yes, Jimmy, you surely ain't forgot how to run, have you?"

"Well, o' course, Jim," said Buck, rocking unsteadily upon his high heels, but slightly sobered by violent exercise, "you've 'pologized to me and I've 'pologized to you and they ain't no more to be said. You fired me this afternoon for killin' a white camel and I bumped your head just now, and it turns out that we was both after another fell'r and he got away. You got

a sore head and I got a sore leg. That makes us even. No hard feelings? Shake!"

"No hard feelings," said Montague, touching a lump back of his ear. "I'm sorry I accused you of shooting the camel, Buck, but the evidence——"

"She did look bad, for a fact!" said Buck magnanimously.

"You'd better go to bed now," advised Montague. "You've got a hard day's work ahead of you."

"I still got my li'l ol' job?" asked Buck.

"Yes, and to-morrow we'll pick out a camel that won't bite."

"Nothin' could be fairer than that—abs'lutely!" said Buck, making a dignified exit upon the arm of Ben Leslie.

Jimmy Montague remained seated on the baggage truck, wrapped in thought. He was patching together the old, old hodge-podge of cause and effect.

"By golly!" said he at last, "I'd like to get my hands on the fellow who wrote that article about the wild camels! He's responsible for everything!"

Three shadowy figures slipped into the desert and headed toward the east. The faint night breeze carried a yelping, snarling chorus. Uncle Jimmy Belcher smiled as he whacked his burros with a barrel stave.

"Got a reg'lar camp meeting to-night, ain't

you?" he cackled. "Well, you can thank me for it. Camel meat's pretty good, hey? Jimmy, what say we sleep out here somewhere? Why, seein' that they've got the rest of them wild camels hived up in a corral I reckon it would be safe enough. Yes, sir, this is the place for us—right out in the sand. We never did care much for city life nohow."

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

DAVID SELIGMAN, vice-president of the Titan Company and a prince in the moving-picture realm, had reached his position of eminence solely by reason of his ability to keep abreast of the times. No other branch of industry has developed with such astounding rapidity, but the changes, as they came, found David in step with the drum-beat of progress.

“Do something new, and do it first!” was his motto; and he clung to it, though he drove directors to the point of emotional insanity. From his office on Fifth Avenue, in New York, he kept an eagle eye on the field, and if he could not always be the standard bearer he was seldom far behind the flag as it moved forward.

A film pioneer, he had watched the evolution of the moving picture from the days of its very raw infancy, when anything that could be thrown on a screen was good enough to get the money, and the cost of photography was the largest item of expense. Then the novelty wore off and audiences began to demand some-

thing more than a plotless jumble of pictures. David took thought and issued a proclamation to his managers and directors.

"We've got to quit making up these picture plays as we go along," said he. "Up to now we have been getting away with it, because people didn't believe it possible to make photographs that move; but they come to see 'em and are satisfied. The game is getting too big for the bunk stuff; the public won't stand for a film without a story in it. Art—that's what they want; and we'll give it to 'em. Let's have real plays and real actors from now on."

Company payrolls doubled and trebled, actors were enticed from the stage, and scenario departments came into existence. Art entered into the making of moving-picture films, and this sufficed for many years; but original ideas became scarce, competition grew keen and the flag moved again.

"Names!" said David Seligman. "That's what they want now; good stories by regular writers and names to carry 'em. Some of the other fellows have been dramatizing novels and getting away with it—old moth-eaten novels that are out of date. A dead writer is no business. Me for one that's alive!"

A few days later Seligman touched an electric button and summoned his secretary, Marco Lazarus.

"You don't read much fiction—novels—do you, Marco?" he began.

"Where would I get any time to read?" asked Marco.

"You should take time," said David reprovingly. "You got your nights to yourself."

"A good musical comedy show is better than any book," said Marco with the air of one dismissing a subject.

"So you think," said David. "Now this book here"—he touched a flaring cloth-bound volume as he spoke—"which was written by a party named Peckinpaw—Marcellus M. Peckinpaw—maybe you never even heard the name of it—eh?"

Marco shook his head.

"The name of it is 'The Lure of the West,'" said Seligman. "I am surprised at you, Marco. It's a best seller and they advertise it everywhere, like a circus. Everybody is talking about it. I read it the other night and I don't wonder at it at all. It's got more action than a dog fight. In every chapter there is shooting. . . . Do you know any authors, Marco?"

"I seen one once at a theater," said Marco, "but nobody could have told it to look at him."

"Did you think maybe he would carry a pen behind his ear?" asked Seligman. "Now this Marcellus M. Peckinpaw is a little man with glasses and a cough. If you ask me I would say he is absolutely the extreme end of the limit."

"How do you know he is?"

"Didn't I have him to dinner last night at the

Astor? And didn't I sign him up for the moving-picture rights to his novel? Five thousand dollars it cost me before he would do business at all. And what do you think this party insists we shall do?"

"How should I know?" Authors and their ways were beyond Marco.

"I had to write it in the contract that he must be consulted about making the picture; and that, Marco, was a compromise. What this Marcellus M. Peckinpaw wanted was that we should let him take full charge and do the directing himself—and he never saw the inside of a studio in his life. Think of that for nerve! He says that we are liable to spoil the atmosphere of the book!"

"Atmosphere! What's that?"

"I don't know exactly, but in this case I think it is mostly gunpowder and cowboys and Indians. All the Indians I ever saw had plenty of atmosphere. You couldn't stay in the same room with one."

"Huh!" said Marco scornfully. "For five thousand dollars he should worry about a little thing like atmosphere!"

"Just what I told him—absolutely; but he would not sign any other way. He was going away mad and I had to meet his terms. I am paying his expenses to Los Angeles. I will advise Montague about the atmosphere, and Montague will get along with him somehow."

"Montague will be sore," prophesied Marco.

"Montague is always sore at this office," said David. "He kicks more than all the other directors we got; but he also delivers the goods. I sent him a night letter that he should get the book and read it and have a five-reel scenario ready when this Peckinpaw gets out there. . . . Would you like to read the book, Marco?"

"I'd rather see the picture," was the cautious reply.

"So would I," said Seligman. "Montague will make improvements on the story. He always does. What I can't understand is how a man living in New Jersey knows so much about cowboys and Indians. The book is full of 'em, Marco!"

"There ain't no Indians in New Jersey," said the secretary skeptically.

"Not outside of Princeton," said Seligman; "but this Peckinpaw, now, he knows regular Indians—feathers and yellow paint. He told me so. And he writes about a cowboy so natural that you almost see him. With everybody reading the book and talking about it, a five-reeler should get the money."

"Montague will be sore," repeated Marco. "You know he thinks he shall be the whole pig or none."

"Take a letter," said David. "You see, Marco, in order to land this Marcellus M. Peckinpaw I had to let him think that Montague would be a kind of office boy to him. I will explain to Montague that he must humor the fel-

low as much as possible. They will fix it somehow."

II

BEN LESLIE and Buck Parvin, property man and moving-picture cowpuncher, were loafing in the shade outside the Titan Company's studio building, smoking brown-paper cigarettes and exchanging reminiscences.

"And so I told him," said Buck, "pretty much what I thought of him. 'You are the most ignorant guy I ever saw in my life,' I says. 'You don't know nothing and always will; and you ought to be careful or the hawks will eat you up. You come round here telling me my business and some day I will get annoyed and hit you. I don't like your shape, your feet don't track, and there's something wrong with that wart on top of your shoulders.' 'You mean my head?' he says, kind of sore. 'Head!' I says. 'Don't kid yourself, Percival! That ain't no head. Your neck just naturally grewed out and haired over.' And that was how it started. He picked up a whippletree——"

Buck's narrative suffered an interruption in the shape of a small, narrow-shouldered gentleman, at sight of whom Buck's eyes and mouth opened and remained fixed in a combination stare and gape.

The stranger wore a slate-colored corduroy riding suit, reinforced with leather; pigskin puttees; a broad gray sombrero, very new and stiff as to crown and brim; a soft white shirt; a flowing tie, and immense round spectacles with heavy rims of dark tortoise-shell. His features were mild enough, but the spectacles imparted to his countenance somewhat the look of a startled ground owl.

"I—I beg your pardon," said the stranger, enunciating very clearly and peering at Buck's chaps and green silk shirt; "I beg your pardon, but perhaps you can inform me where I shall find a Mister—Mister——" He paused and, fumbling in an inner pocket, drew out an envelope, glanced at it and resumed: "Oh, yes—a Mr. James Montague. I have a letter of introduction to him."

"Straight ahead, first turning to the left and down the hall," said Leslie.

"Thanks very much," said the stranger, and entered the building. Ben and Buck exchanged amused glances.

"Name it and you can have it," said Ben.

"Thanks very much, old chap," mimicked Buck, "but I ain't collected any curios since I was a kid. Did you pipe that make-up? And I bet I saw something that you missed: The little sucker had a handkerchief up his sleeve an' a watch strapped on his wrist. He did, on the level!"

"And I saw something that you missed," said

Leslie. "I got a slant at that envelope and it was from the New York office—old man Seligman's private stationery."

"No! Maybe the high boss is tryin' to saw off a comedian on Jim. Or maybe this is a shipment to the animal farm, Ben. Him and that long-nosed anteater ought to be great little pals—eh?"

Ben thumped his knee, with a sudden exclamation.

"I've got him pegged, Buck! You know that five-reel Western picture that Jim has been working on for a week—the one he's making over from a novel? Remember how he was cussing round here about Seligman shipping the author out to help us put it on? Well, this is the fellow. Jim has been expecting him."

"That little billy-owl?" said Buck. "Get out!"

"I'll bet you the drinks. The round eyeglasses tipped his mitt. Authors wear 'em because they think it gives 'em that literary look."

"Him—write a Western novel?" scoffed Buck. "Why, where would he get it? It can't be done!"

In this Buck was mistaken. It had been done. Marcellus M. Peckinpaw—for it was indeed that renowned genius—had written a Western novel and a best seller. Western critics—crude fellows of the baser sort, no doubt—had hinted that Mr. Peckinpaw's knowledge of the noble

savage had been gleaned from the works of Mr. Fenimore Cooper. They had also pointed out that his cowpunchers conversed in a dialect unknown on land or sea; but these innuendoes were unfair as well as unkind.

Marcellus M. Peckinpaw knew his West and freely admitted it whenever possible. He had made one trip from ocean to ocean; men have written volumes on less. True, it was warm and dusty in the Pullman after the train left Kansas City and the curtains had been down during the daylight part of the journey; but, in spite of this slight drawback, Mr. Peckinpaw had managed to see a great deal of the sandy Southwest.

At Albuquerque, for instance, he had spent a fascinating half hour in careful inspection of the wooden-faced, pottery-peddling aborigines. The Indians had also inspected Mr. Peckinpaw; so the benefits, if any, had been mutual.

He had lingered one whole week in a tourist hotel on the Pacific Coast, dressing for dinner each evening and absorbing local color and atmosphere. Then, returning home by another route, he had seen the broad-hatted and bow-legged sons of Wyoming; in fact, had even spoken with one on the depot platform at Green River.

Nor was this all—far from it! “The Lure of the West” had been written under direct inspiration.

Mr. Peckinpaw, commissioned to do a magazine article dealing with the various places of amusement in the city of New York, had visited a Wild West Show in Madison Square Garden. The press agent of the establishment, scenting high-class publicity, had taken Mr. Peckinpaw below stairs to view the West at close range.

He had seen real Indians, feathered and smeared with ochre, reclining on bales of hay. He had been introduced to Chief Singing Mule, and had grasped the hand that had grasped the hand of the late lamented Sitting Bull. He had the press agent's word for it. He had seen a mangy buffalo; had heard a cowpuncher from Springfield, Massachusetts, warble the opening stanza of "The Cowboy's Lament"; had made obeisance before the sole surviving scout of the plains—and the very next week the first chapter of "The Lure of the West" had been written. It was a great novel. If there be doubters let them ask for a copy of Mr. Peckinpaw's royalty statement and thereafter hold their peace.

Mr. James Montague, himself a genius whose fame as a producing director girdled the globe, took a pipe out of his mouth to greet the distinguished visitor. It cannot be said that Montague was in a pleasant frame of mind. For four days he had wrestled mightily with "The Lure of the West," endeavoring to stretch it into five reels; and the things he had said about

Mr. Seligman and Mr. Peckinpaw came hot from his heart.

After the usual polite nothings, during which the men took stock of each other, Mr. Peckinpaw came abruptly to business.

"I presume you are ready to begin the—er—photography, Mr. Montague," said he. "My time is limited. I should like to finish by Saturday night, if possible."

"By Saturday night!" ejaculated the amazed director. "Holy Moses, man! Saturday night! How long do you think it takes to put on a five-reel feature?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, I'm sure," said Mr. Peckinpaw, stifling a yawn. "It's merely a matter of turning a crank, isn't it?"

Montague threw himself back in his chair and howled until the windows rattled.

"Merely a matter of turning a crank!" he said after recovering his breath. "That's good! That's immense! Say, look at this pile of typewritten pages, will you? That's only a piece of the scenario—just a beginning. Then, when everything else is fixed, I'll have to move the entire company out into the hills and pitch a camp. We may have to stay there a couple of weeks, getting the location stuff. After that we'll come back here and make the studio scenes. By Saturday night! If we have a lot of luck we may get through with it in a month! It'll take a week to get the extra people together."

"It seems a long time," said Mr. Peckinpaw; "but why bother with all these things?" He pointed to the typewritten pages. "Why can't you start at the beginning of the book and work through, chapter by chapter? That would seem to be the simplest way."

Montague's pipe sagged in his mouth and he stared hard at his visitor.

"Say, are you trying to kid me?" he demanded.

"Most certainly not. I was merely offering a suggestion."

"Oh, that was a suggestion, was it? I thought it was a joke. Well, Mr. Peckinpaw, I haven't the time just now to explain why all this preliminary work is necessary to the making of a moving picture. You can take it from me that laying out the ground plan of a five-reel feature is quite some job. It's not a thing you can go at hit or miss. I'll call on you at your hotel this evening and we'll go over the scenario together as far as I've got. Meantime, you might look round the plant and amuse yourself."

"But," said Mr. Peckinpaw, stiffening slightly, "Mr. Seligman told me I was to superintend this work. I have a copy of my contract at the hotel. Mr. Seligman said——"

"Dave is a great kidder," said Montague. "What he meant was that you should assist with your ideas as to the way the scenes should be played, and all that sort of thing. I'll be

glad to have your suggestions when we get to the acting; but this mechanical work must be done first. You can't help me with it because you're not a moving-picture director. You're an author."

Something in the way Montague pronounced the last word brought a flush to Mr. Peckinpaw's sallow cheeks.

"My contract——" he began.

"Yes, yes," said Montague soothingly; "I'll look at your contract this evening. If there is anything in it about your succeeding me as director of this company——"

"I didn't say that!" snapped Mr. Peckinpaw, nettled. "Mr. Seligman told me——"

"I wouldn't believe Dave Seligman under oath. Greatest kidder in the world! But we can thresh that out this evening. Meantime, this junk"—Montague's hand fell lightly on a copy of "The Lure of the West" as he spoke; it may have been an accident—"must be licked into shape. If it was up to me I'd only make a one-reel picture out of the book. Where did you say you were stopping?"

Mr. Peckinpaw gave the name of his hotel and rose to go.

"One thing I shall certainly insist on," said he firmly, "I wish to select the actors. I am a believer in type, Mr. Montague."

"You've got nothing on me," was the rejoinder. "Picking types is one of the best things I do. I'm noted for it."

“Now, for instance,” said Mr. Peckinpaw, to whom no remarks were quite as important as his own, “there is the character of Shining Cloud, my young Indian chief. I shall require the perfect Indian type—high cheek bones, prominent nose, and—er—all that sort of thing. I positively will not permit a white man to play Shining Cloud. I must have an Indian.”

“Calm yourself!” said Montague. “I’ve got the very man you want. His name is Peter Lone Wolf; he’s a full-blooded Oglala Sioux, and he’s about the typiest type of Indian that you most ever saw. He can act too. See you later. Good-day!”

At eleven o’clock that night Mr. Montague stepped out of the elevator into the lobby of the hotel that had the honor of housing Mr. Marcellus M. Peckinpaw. He walked straight to the telegraph desk, scribbled a message on a night-letter blank, flung it at the operator and marched out, his heels clattering on the tiled floor.

Ten minutes later Mr. Peckinpaw appeared and hurried to the telegraph desk. After considerable thought he also composed a message. The next morning Mr. David Seligman chuckled as he handed two telegrams to Marco Lazarus, who read as follows:

What have I ever done to you that I should have a nut like Peckinpaw wished on me? If you want to turn this studio over to pin-headed

authors you can count me out. Wire him to mind his own business.

MONTAGUE.

Situation here extremely difficult. M. seems disposed to question terms of contract—even suggests adding characters and incidents not in book and altering plot. Will never consent to this! Wish to avoid open clash if possible. What do you advise?

M. M. PECKINPAW.

“I knew you would start something!” said Marco. “How are you going to straighten it out?”

David Seligman grinned and winked at his secretary.

“I am a diplomat,” said he. “I wired ’em both to hurry up with the picture. Only loafers have time for fighting.”

III

MR. SELIGMAN’S telegrams produced the desired effect, and the open clash which Mr. Peckinpaw dreaded was averted by a narrow margin. Montague found it wise to drop the subject of certain changes his experience told him were necessary to the success of the picture; and the author, believing he had carried his

point, became, as Montague remarked, almost human in spots.

The dove of peace found the director's small office more crowded than usual, because Mr. Peckinpaw insisted on having a table in one corner, where he toiled manfully at something Jimmy Montague was pleased to call the character scenario. He gravely assured the author that this was of the utmost importance.

"Of course, Peckinpaw, I get an idea from reading the book what these folks ought to be like," explained Montague, "but I don't want to trust my own judgment. You created these characters and it stands to reason you know 'em better than anybody else. Write everything out in full—how you think these people ought to look and walk and talk. The more I have to work on, the better."

"And, if you'll believe me," said Montague to Charlie Jennings, his assistant, "he fell for it! It keeps the little devil out of mischief; he lets me alone and he actually thinks he's helping me! He's writing his fool head off. Yesterday he wanted me to read nine pages about that Injun of his!"

"Shining Cloud?" asked Jennings, who had found it necessary to read "The Lure of the West."

"That's the bird—Shining Cloud. He says that all the people who wrote him letters about the book were stuck on the Injun. Some of

'em said he was the noblest character in fiction."

"On the level, Jim," said Jennings, "do you think this fellow ever saw a regular Indian in all his life?"

"Darned if I know! Judging by the book I'd say he hadn't. He'll see one this morning, though. Peter Lone Wolf is just finishing up that Western picture for the Alpha Company down the street. He's going to come over in all his make-up. Peckinpaw is daffy to see him; he's afraid Peter won't come up to the plans and specifications of Shining Cloud. You know, Charlie, this little shrimp has been patted on the back so much about his book that he's come to think that those characters of his are real! He talks about Shining Cloud as though he was alive."

It was on this very morning that Mr. Peckinpaw ceased his labors to offer another suggestion.

"Mr. Montague, I believe I have found the very man to play Deep Creek Jordan, the cowboy lover," said he.

"So-o?" from Montague, with a rising inflection.

"It's that chap who hangs round here all the time—typical Westerner—quaint sort of individual. He wears a green shirt and——"

"Oh, Buck Parvin! He can't play Deep Creek—that's a part for the leading man. Buck can ride and do stunts, but he's no actor.

Never will be. Jack La Rue is the fellow. He'll not only look Deep Creek but he'll play him like a streak. Jack is some lover—take it from me!"

"I'm sorry," said Peckinpaw. "You see, in a way I had promised the part to this Buck, as you call him."

"Been making friends with Buck, have you?"

"Rather! We had quite a chat yesterday. He was telling me some of his experiences among the Indians—quite thrilling they were."

"I'll bet!" said Montague dryly.

"He has read my book," said Peckinpaw, "and he asked for an autographed copy. I rather suspect he intends making a present to a lady. Women seem to prize autographed copies. He says——"

What else Mr. Parvin said is not known, for the door of the director's office swung open and a tremendous and imposing figure entered. It was Peter Lone Wolf, moving-picture Indian, all six feet of him bravely decked out in buckskin, beads and feathers. Mr. Peckinpaw, taken entirely by surprise, gazed on this colorful vision of savagery and made a noise like a frightened duck.

"Hello, Peter!" said Montague.

The young Indian nodded his head slightly in acknowledgment of the salutation and the feathers of his towering war bonnet swept the ceiling. He did not speak, but Mr. Peckinpaw did.

“Wonderful! Magnificent! What a noble bearing! What expression! He is the living image of Shining Cloud—by heaven, he *is* Shining Cloud! Does—does he understand English, Mr. Montague?”

Montague did not answer; he was watching the Indian. Peter Lone Wolf turned his head slowly and looked down at the little author as an eagle might look at a linnet. His grave and beady scrutiny took in every visible detail of Mr. Peckinpaw's attire, and was focused at last on the large round spectacles. Mr. Peckinpaw experienced the sensation of shriveling physically; he felt himself growing smaller and smaller under that piercing regard. Some unidentified instinct prompted him to back into the corner of the room, but those unwinking eyes held him captive. He could not move hand or foot, but he did manage to hunch one shoulder.

Peter Lone Wolf seemed to swell and grow larger. His head lifted; his chin thrust itself forward. Then, still staring at Mr. Peckinpaw, he folded his arms on his chest and broke the silence with a terrific grunt, which seemed to come from the very soles of his moccasins:

“Woof!”

Mr. Peckinpaw's heart fluttered against his ribs and, ostrich-wise, he closed his eyes; but as nothing happened to him he opened them again in time to witness a dignified and majestic exit. Peter Lone Wolf, his arms still

folded on his chest and his eyes on Mr. Peckinpaw to the last, backed slowly out of the room and departed, grunting at every stride.

"Well," said Montague, "how do you like my Indian?"

"Superb! Glorious!" Mr. Peckinpaw was recovering from a nervous chill and was chattering volubly. "What native grace! What insolent pride! Why, the man might have been a king, the way he looked at me! And he positively makes one feel his physical superiority! I wish I might have talked with him in his own tongue—gotten his viewpoint on life and what it means to him. There must be a mind behind such eyes! And what a wonderful face—so stern and sad, and yet so brave! All the sorrows of a vanishing people are written on it; all the records of a hopeless struggle against a superior race. . . . But *are* we a superior race, Mr. Montague? Are we? Where have we a specimen to match this magnificent savage in physique, in simple dignity, in—in——"

Not having his Dictionary of Synonyms handy, Mr. Peckinpaw stranded, gasping. Montague bent his shaking shoulders over his work, but said nothing.

Later Mr. Peckinpaw found pleasure in emptying himself of sensations and adjectives for the benefit of Buck Parvin, who listened soberly enough, but with eyes dangerously bright and twinkling.

"Civilization," said Mr. Peckinpaw in con-

clusion, "has never produced such a type. It cannot!"

"And a darn' good thing!" said Buck. "Listen to me! I know this Injun—knew his ole daddy too. He was Chief Curly Wolf. You remember him, don't you?"

"The—the name is familiar," said Mr. Peckinpaw. "I cannot quite place him."

"That's funny—and you made a study of Injuns too! Ever heard of Sitting Bull?"

Here Mr. Peckinpaw was on established ground. Eagerly he spoke of the intimate relations with Chief Singing Mule and the hand that had grasped the hand of Sitting Bull.

"Well," said Buck, "Curly Wolf was the guy that put the Bull in Sitting Bull. Sitting Bull got all the press notices, but the Injun that deserved the credit was Curly Wolf. He was the worst ole murdering cutthroat that ever turned a rancher inside out to see what made him tick! Him and Sitting Bull was as close as two fingers on a glove; and, if it hadn't been for this Curly Wolf, Sitting Bull would have been as tame as a nanny goat. Curly Wolf used to rib him up to commit all them meanesses and then go along with him to see that he didn't weaken. Sitting Bull wouldn't no more think of going on the warpath without his pardner than he'd fly to the moon! . . . Kind of unfortunate about this Peter Lone Wolf; but, seeing who his daddy was, I reckon he comes honestly by it."

"Comes honestly by what?" asked Mr. Peckinpaw, all ears.

"Why, his habits. Every so often he goes sort of bug—crazy; paints himself for war; gives the death yell, and wants to butcher somebody like his daddy did. He was born while his family was up in the Little Big Horn country pulling off the Custer Massacre. Maybe that's got something to do with the spells he takes."

"Prenatal influence unquestionably," murmured Mr. Peckinpaw.

"Hey? Well, whatever it is, it comes on him just so often, same as a periodical souse. Sometimes he gives warning; sometimes the only warning you get is the death yell. I see you mention the death yell in your book, so you know about it."

"Does he ever—hurt anybody?" asked Mr. Peckinpaw timidly.

"Well, no—he don't seem to aim to torture 'em none; his notion is to kill outright," was the reassuring answer.

"And—has he?"

"As to that," said Buck judicially, "some say he has and some say he hasn't. It depends on whether you count Mexicans. Some do and some don't. It's all a matter of how you're raised. Personally, myself, I never seen him get that far. We gener'ly rope an' hawg-tie him before he gets a good start. In a day or so it wears off and he's all right again. I

thought I'd tell you, so you wouldn't go pesti-
cating round him too much. He ain't very
strong for Easterners; it was an Easterner that
filled his daddy full of buckshot."

"Why, he's dangerous!" said Mr. Peckin-
paw. "He has the homicidal mania!"

"He's got all that," said Buck cheerfully.
"The best way is to keep an eye on him all the
time. If you hear him cut loose with that war
whoop of his don't stop to ask any questions.
Fade right away while your hair is on your
head. Why, he even tried to scalp me once!"

"He did! What did you do?"

"Busted him on the head with the butt of
my gun. I'd have shot him—I wanted to—
but Montague wouldn't let me. The Injun was
working in the picture and it wasn't finished
yet. And say, speaking of Montague"—Buck
paused and his embarrassment was quite evi-
dent—"speaking of Montague, I'd like to ask
a favor of you."

"Anything at all, Buck," said Peckinpaw.

"I wish you wouldn't tell him that I tipped
off this Peter proposition to you. He—he
didn't want you to know or else he'd have told
you himself. If Jim should find out that I done
it—good-by, Buck, that's all! He'd fire me in
a minute."

"I promise you I won't mention it to a soul!"
said Mr. Peckinpaw earnestly. "Not a soul!"

"Thanks," said Buck. "I'll kind of keep

an eye on this Lone Wolf, and if I see any signs of it coming on I'll tell you the first one."

"I wish you would, Buck," said Mr. Peckinpaw. "You won't forget?"

"You bet I won't! You've called me Buck; so I'm going to call you Marcellus. No; I reckon I'll call you Marsh for short. Is that all right?"

"Call me anything you like," said Mr. Peckinpaw, "but watch that Indian!"

That night the author of "The Lure of the West" did not rest well. He dreamed of Peter Lone Wolf and gory scalps, and waked to find himself in a cold sweat.

IV

It was early evening at the field headquarters of the Titan Company. It had once been a deserted ranch house—lonely buildings lying at the foot of the low California hills—but now horses whickered in the corrals, lanterns flashed in the barn, men and women sat under the great oaks or moved about the porch; and from the kitchen came tempting odors telling of ham and eggs and coffee.

Tents were pitched in the yard and the meadow beyond; and in one of them a celebrated author sulked and waited for the dinner call, while in another and larger tent James Montague swore softly as he checked off the list of

scenes made that day. He swore because the list was shorter than it should have been—and there was a reason.

Charlie Jennings entered the director's tent; but, seeing that his chief was in a savage humor, he held his tongue. Montague finished his work, threw the papers into the table drawer, slammed it shut and looked up.

"Where is he, Charlie?"

"In his tent."

"Well, I wish he'd stay there!" said Montague. "I'm getting good and sick of his nonsense. I thought, from the way he acted after the first run-in we had, he was going to show a little sense about the changes I've made in his story; but ever since we've been here it's fuss, fuss, fuss! He's as persistent as a mosquito."

"You can slap a mosquito," said Jennings.

"Yes; and I'll slap this New Jersey pest if he doesn't let me alone!" said the exasperated director. "I've got the entire company and two hundred extra people out here, forty miles from nowhere, under heavy expense, and Peckinpaw seems to think I haven't got a thing to do but argue with him! The little runt! Here I give him the finest Western outfit that ever went on location—more Indians, more cow-punchers and more prairie schooners than we've ever used before—and he doesn't even know it! And he's holding up an outfit of this size to quibble about things not being in his damned book!

“I’ve told him a thousand times—you’ve heard me, Charlie—that I can’t make a good five-reeler out of the book as it stands. I’ve explained why we have to put in stunt stuff; I might as well talk to an Indian squaw about eugenics or deliver a stump speech to a hitching post! He doesn’t get any part of it and he argues right back to the point where he started—it ain’t in the book; and that settles it for him. Now to-day, when we were working in the cañon, he ran right in front of the camera to give La Rue a bawling out—and La Rue was playing the scene exactly as I told him to play it. We had to make it over again; and when I asked him whether he didn’t know any better than to run in front of the camera he batted his eyes at me and said that La Rue was doing something that wasn’t in the book.”

“When do you pull the burning-barn stunt?” asked Jennings.

“To-morrow; and I suppose there’ll be an awful row over it. Peckinpaw will have a fit. I told him yesterday when I caught him running through my script that if there wasn’t a burning barn in his book there should have been. He nearly went through the ceiling—told me I didn’t know anything about art. To-day he was threatening to sue us for damages and hold up the film in the courts. I guess he overlooked the little joker in his contract about ‘a suitable film production.’ Maybe he’s only trying to run a sandy on me; but he’s got me nagged

till I'm almost off my nut, and he's driving the actors crazy with his continual butting in."

"All but Peter," said Jennings. "He lays off of Shining Cloud, I notice. For some reason or other he won't go within gunshot of the Injun; and if Peter comes into the dining-room while he's there Peckinpaw gets up and goes out."

"Peter got his goat the first time he saw him—that's why. I wish I had it. Confound Dave Seligman! He shipped me an elephant that went crazy in the middle of a picture and I stood for it; he sent me some nice tame wolves which bit everybody that worked with 'em, and I stood for that; but if he sends me any more temperamental authors I'm through! There's a limit to what a man can stand!"

"Ain't it the truth?" said Buck Parvin, at the tent flap. He had heard part of the conversation. "There's a limit to how much cold a man can stand, Jim. I want some more blankets. I like to froze to death last night."

"Go steal 'em from the extra people," said the director. "What do you think I've got here—a general store?"

"Say," remarked Buck, still lingering, "little Marshie is kind of gumming the cards, ain't he? I got a new girl now and she ain't used to me being away like this. Somebody'll win her from me while we're fussing with this author. Can't you invite him to take a walk and not come back?"

"I wish I could," said Montague. "He won't even take a day off to go trout fishing, he's so afraid I'll slip over something that ain't in the book!"

"Do you want him to leave this place?" asked Buck.

"Do I! I'd give a thousand dollars to have him away from here to-morrow while we pull the barn fire."

"Make it a hundred, Jim—make it fifty and mean it—and you're on!" said Buck.

"The fifty goes," said Montague; "but Peckinpaw won't. He'll stick!"

"Bet you next week's salary!" said Buck.

"I won't rob you," said the director. "The only way he'll leave is in a box. He's just that stubborn in his narrow way!"

"He'll go," said Buck. "Little Marshie will go away from here of his own accord. He'll likely stay away all day and there won't be any comeback at you. That's good enough, ain't it?"

"Too good to be true!" said Jennings.

"Wait and see if it is," chuckled Buck.

"Don't you get him hurt!" warned Montague.

"Who, Marshie? My little pal? Why, I wouldn't harm a splinter on his head! He's going to put me in his next book. Then maybe Seligman will buy the movie rights. I'll play the lead; Marshie will come out and help us put it on, and——"

Here a boot whizzed past Buck's head and he withdrew, laughing. It was nearly dark by this time, but there was light enough for him to make out a tall figure pacing up and down under the oaks.

"Pete, ole boy," said the cowpuncher to himself, "I wonder how game you are? I reckon the best way to find out is to ask you."

V

MARCELLUS M. PECKINPAW rose from his cot when the sun was streaking the east with gold. All about him was perfect peace and there was a great quietness; Mr. Peckinpaw was the one disturbing note in the symphony of the dawn, for as he rose he girded himself for war.

He had spent the larger portion of the night in thinking up many cutting things he would say to James Montague, and he could scarcely wait to give them tongue. What? Butcher his inspired work to please low-browed ten-cent audiences? Sacrifice his art to pander to the depraved taste of the rabble? Not if he died for it! At any cost that barn should not burn. It had not burned in the book.

Mr. Peckinpaw stepped out of his tent and looked on the sleeping camp. To a man with eyes and imagination, the sight was worth while.

First, there were the tents of the regular

members of the company—soldier tents, pitched with military precision. Indeed, they were later to serve as the tents of General Crook's command, and even the feeblest imagination might easily have peopled them with cavalymen; but this eye-witness was not thinking of tents—he was thinking of a barn.

Beyond and toward the meadow, looming white and ghostly in the half light, were the prairie schooners—those huge, lumbering vehicles that rutted the Overland Trail in the fifties and sixties. They were drawn up in a circle, after the fashion of emigrant trains in the Indian country, and under the curving canvas tops men and women were sleeping. Here again imagination might have helped—might have suggested that these people were pioneers, sleeping with their guns at their sides in fear of an Indian attack. Imagination might have done this; but Mr. Peckinpaw knew that the sleepers were extra people, earning three dollars a day and drawing two dollars more as a traveling allowance. A little knowledge can be a deadly thing.

At the lower end of the meadow, close to the running stream, were the tepees of the Indian village, their smoke-blackened tops rising sharp against the dawn. Hobbled ponies—shaggy, wiry little brutes—grazed near by. Lean dogs prowled among the tepees, snarling over scraps of bacon rind. A fat squaw, a papoose strapped on her back, waddled into view and knelt on

the ground. It was Four Ax Handles, spouse of Chief Spotted Elk, building the morning fire exactly as her maternal ancestors had built fires on the plains before the white man came. The ascending smoke hung, a thin blue ribbon, in the quiet air.

An emigrant train, an Indian village, a soldiers' camp, a typical ranch house and outbuildings; corrals full of horses and long-horned cattle; a wonderful background of sage-covered hills—and Marcellus M. Peckinpaw, celebrated author of Western fiction, saw only the stage setting of a film drama! There was no kindly soul to tell him that the scenery and the properties were real, and that these people, though actors, were actually living the lives of the characters they assumed before the camera. There was no one to tell him this; had there been, it might have passed unheeded, for Mr. Peckinpaw was thinking of a barn and seeing himself in the attitude of a Casabianca.

Perhaps this was a pity, for, in that brief space before the camp woke and took on its all too evident flavor of theatricism, the atmosphere and true romance of a vanished frontier were there before him. The West that he had never seen—the West that Wister knew and Remington left to us on canvas—lived again in those few moments, to vanish, like a ghost, with the rising of the sun. Mr. Peckinpaw saw but did not understand. He compared the scene unfavorably with the basement of

Madison Square Garden and rehearsed the speeches with which he would rebuke a presumptuous director.

From the barn and corrals came a faint and drowsy Yip-yip-yip-e-e-e! The first moving-picture cowpuncher was astir and the illusion was fading fast—would soon be gone. The real cowpuncher takes no special pride and sees no virtue in sleeping on baled hay—he will have a comfortable bed or know why; but his film brother, who never knew the range, covers himself with a horse blanket, uses his saddle for a pillow, and boasts inordinately of the toughness of his fiber.

From the back yard of the ranch house came a steady whacking sound. The cook's assistant was chopping wood for the breakfast fire. An extra man rolled out of a prairie schooner and saluted the day with a succession of resounding yells. Chief Spotted Elk came out of his tepee, glanced shrewdly at the sky and, squatting in the doorway, proceeded to paint his face, like the dependable moving-picture actor he was. Almost immediately the corrals swarmed with cowpunchers grooming and saddling their horses. Jack La Rue, the leading man, thrust his head into the open and bawled to Jennings, who was seated on a camp-stool in front of his tent, making up his face for the part of the cattle baron.

“Oh, Charlie! What clothes do I put on first?”

"Your puncher outfit," answered Jennings; "and you'd better leave off your chaps. It'll be easier for you to jump out of the barn loft without 'em."

"Jump out of the barn loft!" Mr. Peckinpaw drew himself up to five feet three inches of bristling indignation. There was nothing in the book about Deep Creek Jordan's jumping out of a barn loft! What new outrage was this?

Mr. Peckinpaw was the first man in the dining-room at the ranch house. He had formed the habit of breakfasting early because he had noticed that Peter Lone Wolf breakfasted late. Peter was a privileged Indian. He shared a tent with Buck Parvin and took his meals in the house with the leading people. He never went near the tepee village unless in the performance of a scene, and he utterly ignored the men and women of his race.

Mr. Peckinpaw had studiously avoided the Indian since Buck's warning, but the Indian had not avoided him. A dozen times a day the author looked up to find that steady, beady stare on him, boring through him—a calm and incurious but, nevertheless, disconcerting regard. It seemed to Mr. Peckinpaw that the Indian took a certain solemn pleasure in making him uncomfortable; and in the presence of Peter Lone Wolf the author's clothes felt too large for him and uncertain tremors traveled up and down his spine. This had happened once at breakfast and Mr. Peckinpaw

had resolved that it should never happen again. Under certain circumstances a knife, or even a fork, might become a deadly weapon. An alarm clock, a five-dollar bill to the cook, and the risk of eating in the same room with a homicidal maniac had been averted.

Mr. Peckinpaw was buttering his wheat cakes when Buck Parvin entered and, bending over him, whispered hoarsely:

"Look out, Marsh!"

"Look out for what?" asked Mr. Peckinpaw, with a sinking sensation where his appetite should have been.

"For the Injun! He was yipping a little bit in his sleep last night. He said something about Owlface—that's what he calls you. It's a bad sign and I thought you ought to know."

Mr. Peckinpaw dropped knife, fork and appetite with a crash.

"Does—does he begin that way?" He found some difficulty in pronouncing his words, for his mouth had gone suddenly dry.

"Sometimes he does," said Buck.

"Don't leave him for a minute!" pleaded Mr. Peckinpaw. "I—I rely on you, Buck."

"I sure'll watch him like a hawk," was the reply.

Mr. Peckinpaw looked at his wheat cakes, picked up his knife, dropped it again, and, rising, hurried from the room. Buck finished the wheat cakes, regarding them as the spoils of war. Then he drank three cups of coffee, rolled

a cigarette and strolled out in search of Mr. Peckinpaw. The author was nowhere to be found.

"So soon?" thought Buck. "Why, this is too easy!"

James Montague, tousle-headed and unshaved, appeared in the open and glanced at the sky.

"Not a cloud!" said he. "We ought to get a lot of work done if that little pest will only let me alone."

"Morning, Jim!" said Buck. "Got that fifty handy?"

"What fifty?" asked Montague. "Oh, I remember. No such luck. Peckinpaw will never miss this chance to make trouble."

"All the same, the fifty goes?" questioned the cowpuncher.

"Sure—but there's no chance."

An hour later Ben Leslie and his assistants swarmed through the barn, planting smoke pots and red fire. In a dark corner they came on the distinguished author of "The Lure of the West." He had been hiding behind a grain bin.

"What are these things for?" he asked.

"Fire picture," said Ben. "Better get outside; you can't see it from here. It'll be worth while too. . . . All set, boys? Smoke her up good when you get the word!"

Fear is a compelling motive; but so is a sacred duty to one's art. The titanic struggle

between them was a short one; it left Mr. Peckinpaw weak and shaking but resolved. With all the firmness he could muster, which was not enough to keep his knees from trembling under him, Marcellus M. Peckinpaw marched out of the barn and confronted the entire company just as Montague was giving his final instructions to the actors.

"Jack, you make the jump from the loft window," said he. "It's an easy one and I've had the ground spaded up and straw spread on it. Come straight down, with your hands over your head. Then run——"

Mr. Peckinpaw cleared his throat and moistened his lips with his tongue.

"Mr. Montague," said he, "I cannot permit this. I will not permit this!" He addressed the director, but his wandering eye took note of Peter Lone Wolf slipping into the dressing tent. Buck Parvin was at his heels; and at sight of the cowpuncher, faithful to his trust, Mr. Peckinpaw took heart and courage. "I—I forbid you to do this!" he said.

"Oh, see here now," cajoled Montague; "this is childish, Peckinpaw! Ridiculous! I am making this picture."

"You are making a picture, but you are not making it from my book. I object—I must object—to these unwarrantable liberties! The picture is to be advertised in my name. I am responsible to the public for this production. My name guarantees it. My contract

reads——” He quoted copious extracts from that legal document.

The actors looked at each other and grinned; it was Montague’s trouble—not theirs. The director lost his temper and raged—the author lost his temper and raved; and they raged and raved together up and down in front of the camera while the assembled multitude looked on.

“Ah-h, quit chewin’ the rag and let’s get busy!” pleaded Charlie Dupree, the camera man. Then, under his breath: “Go on, boss! Paste him one for me!”

“It’s an outrage!” spluttered the author. “It’s a breach of contract! I appeal to you all—to your sense of what is fair and right! You know this man is taking liberties with the text! You have read the book——”

“Yes,” interrupted Montague, with a sneer; “they’ve read the book—I made ’em do it. They think as much of your book as I do. They know that unless we stiffen this picture with stunt stuff it won’t stand up—it won’t be any better than your damned book—and that means it’ll be rotten! Now will you get out of the way and let me go on with this scene?”

“I will not!” screamed Mr. Peckinpaw, fairly dancing with rage. “I know my rights and I will stand here and fight to the last! I will not move from this spot! I dare you to touch me! I’ll sue——”

Clear and high above Mr. Peckinpaw’s agi-

tated tenor there arose a startling and ear-piercing howl, soaring in a succession of wild ululations and ending in a long-drawn whoop. The author paused, his bold defiance dying to a rattle in his throat; his chin sagged, and he turned a chalky face toward the dressing tent in time to see Buck Parvin burst into the open, running, terror in his bulging eyes.

The flaps of the tent were dashed aside and Peter Lone Wolf leaped into view, yelling as he came. Naked, save for a breech-clout, moccasins and streaming war bonnet, streaked and splashed with all the colors of the rainbow, a butcher's knife in one hand and a tomahawk in the other, he was indeed an eye-filling, nerve-paralyzing spectacle; and—horror of horrors!—he was heading straight for Mr. Peckinpaw!

Moving-picture people are trained to grasp the action of a scene without loss of time, and this probably explains why Mr. Peckinpaw had a few yards the worst of the general start. In the midst of a frenzied stampede of cowpunchers, actors, extra people and one director, a single figure remained rooted to the spot—Charlie Dupree, true to tradition, did not desert his beloved camera; but he clung to it for support.

“Run, Marsh!” yelled Buck. “For the love of Mike, hump yourself! He’s got ’em again—and he’s after you!”

And Marsh ran. Two men were in a position to witness his amazing burst of speed. Charlie

Dupree afterward declared that the celebrated author ran the first mile in nothing flat. Buck Parvin said he lowered all world's records up to ten miles. The truth may lie somewhere between the two statements. It is certain the author was almost immediately swallowed up by the nearest cañon, distant some two hundred yards. Later he was seen passing over a low ridge half a mile away, his short legs flying like drumsticks. They had need to fly, for ten feet behind him loped Peter Lone Wolf; and the wind brought back the echoes of his terrible death yell.

"What is it all about?" asked James Montague, crawling out from under a prairie schooner. "Is Peter pickled, or what?" Then he saw Buck Parvin smiling at him—a meaning and virtuous smile.

"You owe me fifty, Jim," said Buck.

"You darned fool!" yelled Montague. "Why didn't you tell me what was coming off? Don't you know I've got a weak heart?"

VI

BLACK dark hung over the encampment, but in the director's tent there was a light. This much was observed by one who peered through the brush at the edge of the clearing. With halting steps and many pauses for listening, he

drew near; voices came to him and the click and rattle of poker chips.

The reader is a good guesser; he knows we have here a celebrated author returning from a journey into the hills. Mr. Peckinpaw's clothes were torn and dirty; he had lost his hat; his hair was matted with burs; his face was scratched, and he walked with two separate and distinct limps—one for each leg. He was about to lift the tent flap when he heard a voice that gave him pause. Buck Parvin, his friend and protector, was speaking:

“As a writer he may be a joke—I'm no judge; but as a runner—say, what would he do to one of them Marathons? Put an Injun behind him and he'd run first, second and third—that's all! I'll bet he ran so far that it'll take him a month to walk back. You reckon he'll want to sue somebody for this?”

“No chance!” This was Montague speaking. “Don't you think he knows how much fun the newspapers can have with this story? An author chased by one of his own creations! No; he'll never tell that on a witness stand. They'd kid him to death. He won't sue!”

“The modern Frankenstein, eh?” A third voice took up the strain—a deep, vibrant voice, which Mr. Peckinpaw told himself he had never heard before. “Yes, that would make fairly good reading. Somehow it isn't the fellow's manner that I object to, offensive as it is. He doesn't know any better! Some communities

turn out creatures of his sort by the gross—and it takes a gross of 'em to make a man. Peckinpaw is as God made him, and I excuse a great deal on that account; but I do hold him criminally liable for that piffling book. I read it when it first came out. That it sold at all is proof of the decline of our literary standards; that it became a best seller is a fearful indictment against public taste. I can excuse lack of plot; I can wink at ignorance of subject matter; I can even read a Western novel with Fenimore Cooper Indians in it—but sheer, bad workmanship is where I draw the line! Peckinpaw is a pitiful little literary hack. What he mistakes for attainments are the cheap tricks of the penny-a-liner, and his sentence construction is vile. He has been taught not to split his infinitives, but as for the rest—phew! . . . Gentlemen, I will now crack this pot for a large shining dollar. Come in, Buck! Faint heart never filled a spade flush, which is the best thing I learned at Harvard.”

Mr. Peckinpaw's face flushed painfully in the darkness and his hand fell away from the tent flap; but it returned again. At any cost he must know who dared call Marcellus M. Peckinpaw a pitiful little literary hack. Cautiously he moved the canvas a fraction of an inch and applied his eye to the aperture. Three men were sitting at the table. Two of them he had recognized by their voices. The third man was speaking again.

"Ah, Buck! That's a bad habit you have—trying to beat threes with a four flush. It has been done, but in the long run the practice is ruinous."

The man who was speaking—the owner of the deep, vibrant voice and Harvard prejudice against poor literary workmanship—was none other than Peter Lone Wolf, moving-picture Indian.

Mr. Peckinpaw gulped and stole quietly away in the darkness.

The next morning the distinguished author returned to civilization in one of the company's automobiles. He explained to James Montague that he had washed his hands of the movies, once and for all time.

Peter Lone Wolf, feathered and painted within an inch of his life, waiting to play a scene with Miss Manners, the leading woman, watched Mr. Peckinpaw's departure with the changeless expression of his race.

"I think he is on to us, Buck," said Peter. "I tried the hypnotic eye on him again this morning, but there was nothing doing. I even woofed a few woofs and stamped my foot, but he only glared at me. He looked as though he wanted to stick out his tongue. I have lost my power over him. I wonder why!"

"Well," said Buck, "even Rip Van Winkle had to wake up some time."

"I have had a lot of fun with him," said the

Indian, rising and stretching himself, "and I shall miss him. It was worth the strain of playing the wild and untutored savage—on and off, as it were. . . . By the way, Buck, if we ever get that fifty out of Montague, how do we split it?"

"Fifty-fifty," was the prompt answer.

"And I ran five miles and howled myself hoarse!" murmured Peter Lone Wolf. "It just shows that the Indian always gets the worst of it from the white man. . . . Yes, Mr. Montague! Coming!"

SNOW STUFF

THE night train, westbound to the Coast, deposited a single passenger upon the Truckee Station platform and slipped clicking down the railroad yards, its brilliant tail-lights gleaming above the snow. Winter air in the Sierra Nevadas is brisk and biting, and the lone gentleman thrust his fat hands into his overcoat pockets and looked about him with a mixture of curiosity and condescension. Plainly here was one unused to the provinces, and, by the curl of his lip, not particularly impressed with his surroundings.

On one side of the track was the short main street of Truckee, with its thirty-seven saloons. On the other side was the swiftly flowing river, mirroring the lights of the Ice Palace beyond. The stranger shivered and drew his overcoat closely about him. In cold weather the overcoat proclaims the man, and this garment spoke loudly of Broadway check rooms and brighter lights than Truckee's. Its shell was of the finest melton, lined with undyed sealskin, while the rolling collar and the wide cuffs were of astrakhan. Of the man inside the coat it is

sufficient to say that he wore too many diamonds, had a bulge where his jawline should have been and dimples in place of knuckles. Everything about him suggested fatness and softness, and he wheezed when he lifted up his voice querulously:

"Here, you! Can I get a carriage in this God-forsaken hole?"

The station loafer whom he addressed chuckled from his perch upon a baggage truck:

"A carriage, mister? What for?"

"To take me to the hotel, of course. What did you think I wanted it for?"

The loafer jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Hotel's right across the street," said he. "Folks mostly walk it."

The man in the fur coat grunted, picked up his suitcase and then put it down again.

"Carry this for me!" he commanded.

"Sure!" said the loafer, scenting a quarter. "Why, of course!"

As they were crossing the slushy street, the newcomer planting his patent leathers gingerly, a startling succession of noises rose on the quiet air. First came a long-drawn howl, and before the sound had died away among the pines and tamaracks a dozen tongues answered it. The stranger paused, irresolute. The clamor swelled and grew in volume until the whole night seemed to quiver with it. The man in the sealskin coat recognized the sound. He had

once staged a Broadway musical comedy called "The Queen of Saskatchewan," and the phonographed howlings of a wolf pack had been the hit of the piece.

"Wolves!" said he, and looked back at the depot as if meditating flight.

"Naw!" said the loafer, grinning. "Not wolves, but the next thing to it. There's a movie outfit up here makin' Alaska stuff, and every stable in town is full of them darned malemutes and huskies. They fight all day and howl all night, but outside o' that I guess they're all right."

"Oh, the dog teams, eh?" said the stranger, evidently relieved. "They belong to the Titan Company, don't they?"

"Yeh, that's the name of the outfit. There's been five or six companies here this winter makin' snow pictures, but this is the biggest of the bunch. They got skin canoes, seven or eight sledges, fifty dogs, fur clothes till you can't rest, an' even a lot of Japs that they dress up like Eskimoses."

"And what do you think?" said the loafer five minutes afterward to the keeper of the bar in one of the thirty-seven saloons. "Here I'm givin' all this information to the general manager of the company—the Main Finger, just out from New York. Golly! He sure did jump when them malemutes started singin'!"

While the loafer was spending his newly acquired quarter in a manner that seemed good

to him, Mr. I. Gordan—for so he wrote himself upon the hotel register—was asking the clerk the usual question of his kind.

“What’s doing in town to-night?”

“Well,” said the clerk, “there’s the saloons and the Ice Palace. That’s about all.”

“The Ice Palace?”

“That’s the building across the river from the depot—they flood the floor with water and let it freeze. Best ice skating in the West. You’d better see that, it’s worth while.”

“New York is full of ice rinks,” said Mr. Gordan.

But a night-owl cannot go to bed as long as the lights are burning, and as the thirty-seven saloons were not inviting, to the Ice Palace Mr. Gordan wended his way. There was a visitors’ gallery, but Mr. Gordan believed in being seen as well as in seeing, so he sat on one of the benches reserved for the skaters and his overcoat created a mild sensation among the mackinaws and sweaters. He was too fat to skate, and soon he regretted that such was the case. The regret came after the discovery of a trim young person in a woolly white sweater and a short skirt, who skated alone, performing miracles of grace upon the glassy floor. Mr. Gordan was an expert on feminine charms—had he not selected the broilers for many a musical comedy show?—and his piggy eyes brightened as they followed the lithe, darting figure.

“One swell little gal!” said Mr. Gordan to

himself. Then he addressed the man who sat on the bench beside him. This was a weather-beaten individual in a mackinaw coat, heavy boots and a knitted cap. In this northern disguise his best friends would never have recognized Mr. R. Buchanan Parvin, moving-picture cowpuncher. In fact, Buck often had difficulty in recognizing himself.

"Who's the chicken skating alone?" Mr. Gordan spoke with Forty-second Street familiarity. "The one in the plaid skirt."

Buck looked sharply at Gordan before he replied.

"What if I said it was my wife?"

Mr. Gordan became almost confused, but only because Buck continued to regard him with an unwavering eye.

"I didn't know—I didn't mean——" he began, stammering.

"Well, as it happens she ain't my wife," said Buck, "and she ain't no chicken neither. Here's a tip that won't do you a bit of harm. This ain't a chicken country. It's only once in a great while that we see a pig out here too." Having made his meaning very plain Buck turned his back upon the stranger.

"Huh! The village cut-up!" said Mr. Gordan.

"No-o," said Buck, who was rolling a brown-paper cigarette; "but if you want to do well in this town you better tread light and sing low." After his cigarette was lighted he turned and

puffed the smoke into Mr. Gordan's eyes. Mr. Gordan moved to the other side of the rink. Being a person of one idea at a time and persistence along certain lines, he was rewarded by the information he sought.

"She's an actress—the leading lady with the movie company. Kind of cute, ain't she?"

Mr. Gordan smiled a fat and oily smile.

"I knew I'd seen her before!" said he to himself. "That's Manners, of course!"

An actress! Mr. Gordan sat down to wait, for he knew all about actresses. Of a type unfortunately not rare in certain brightly lighted precincts directly south of Yonkers, he had been associated with musical-comedy productions for many years, hence that knowledge.

"The legitimate, the merry-merry and the movies, they're all alike," mused Mr. Gordan, watching Myrtle Manners cutting figure eights in the middle of the floor. "They're all alike!"

Mr. Gordan was scarcely qualified to speak for the movies, as his experience of film people was limited. An uncle with a keen nose for the dollar had left him a block of stock in the Titan Company, and it was this block of stock, together with a persuasive line of conversation, that had won for Gordan the position of general Western manager, with powers extraordinary.

"Montague and the rest of the directors are spending entirely too much money," said Gordan. "I'll go out and look round a while on the

quiet and see where expenses can be cut down."

"Well, be careful," warned Seligman, the vice-president and actual head of the company. "Don't make any changes without consulting me. A director is a kind of a czar, Izzy. Montague is worse than a czar and he spends money like a Pittsburgh millionaire, but he makes great pictures. Whatever you do, don't antagonize Montague. The fellow has got now offers from three or four other concerns, and we can't afford to lose him."

Mr. Gordan may have seemed half asleep as he sat upon his bench, but he knew when Myrtle Manners left the floor. He was waddling at her heels when she started for the hotel.

"Oh, Miss Manners! One minute!" he called.

The young woman paused, estimated Mr. Gordan with a swift glance and resumed her way.

"Wait! It's all right!" he wheezed reassuringly. "It ain't what you think at all. Wait!"

Miss Manners waited and Gordan approached.

"My name is Gordan," said he. "I'm the new Western manager. I guess you've heard of me, all right. Just got in on the train, and I saw you skating and recognized you from the pictures."

The young woman bowed, but she did not see the fat hand that was offered her.

"You acted as if you thought I was trying to kidnap you," chuckled Gordan. "We might as well get acquainted now as later, hey? How's Montague getting along with the snow stuff?"

"He is at the hotel working on a scenario," said Miss Manners. "He can tell you better than I can."

"Oh, never mind him now," said Mr. Gordan. "Plenty of time for business to-morrow. Kind of quiet up here, ain't it? Nothing to do in the evenings. I suppose there ain't a restaurant in this town where we could have a little supper, hey?"

"If you are hungry," said the young woman, "you can get sandwiches in the railroad eating house."

"What do you do for a good time?" demanded Gordan.

"We work mostly," said Miss Manners. "That reminds me that we make an early start in the morning. You'll excuse me, I'm sure. Good-night."

This time there was no catching her. Mr. Gordan chuckled as he watched the indignant swirl of the plaid skirt.

"Got a temper, have you, girly?" said he to himself. "Well, I've seen 'em with tempers before."

As he prepared for bed Mr. Gordan told himself that Truckee would not be so bad after all.

"They're all alike—actresses," said he, as he turned off the light. "They're always upstage

until they know you. Now this Manners, I'll bet she's a good feller when she gets acquainted."

II

IF Mr. Gordan had been an early riser he would have witnessed an interesting sight in the departure of a moving-picture company equipped for snow stuff. The historic Donner Lake was to be the scene of the day's work, but at the hour of starting the general Western manager was peacefully slumbering, and nothing short of a cannon would have roused him.

The gray dawn brought the sound of wheels and a six-horse coach, which drew up in front of the hotel. The conveyance was for the leading people and the extra women. A dozen Japanese coolies, carefully selected for their heavy features and high cheekbones, plodded by muffled in furs. These were the moving-picture Eskimos. Each Jap's face was painted a ghastly yellow in order that the natural brown of the skin might not offer too great a contrast when photographed against a snowy background.

Next came the dog teams, three in number. Buck Parvin, driving a gee-pole team, was in the lead, maneuvering seven tail-curved and frisky malemutes for the benefit of the few spectators upon the sidewalk. Buck was made

up as an Alaskan musher. He wore a drill parka, a long loose garment that covered him from neck to knee, serving as a protection against wind and cold. The hood and cuffs of his parka were of fur and his feet were incased in mukluks, rude sealskin boots bound about with thongs. The snowshoes he would wear later were strapped upon the sledge. With one eye on his audience and one eye upon the malemutes, Buck straddled the tug behind the wheel dog, and the pop of his thirty-foot whip mingled with his sharp commands.

"Mush—mush on!" he yelled, and the dogs leaped into their collars, moving ahead in a straight line.

"Mush—haw!" The lead dog swung obediently to the left.

"Mush—gee!" The malemutes turned to the right.

"Whoa!" Every dog stopped in his tracks, seemingly waiting for something. There are only five commands that move an Alaskan dog team, and the most important one is the one which Buck forgot to give. Almost immediately the third dog in the line nipped his neighbor smartly on the haunches and in less than two seconds the seven malemutes were piled in a furry heap, rolling, yelling, snapping, snarling and biting.

"Darn it!" said Buck. "I forgot it again!"

He leaped into the midst of the mêlée, kicking and striking right and left with the butt of his

whip. The sidewalk loafers came reluctantly to his aid, for an angry malemute bites promiscuously, and order was at last restored and the traces untangled.

"Down!" yelled Buck. "Down, you devils!" The dogs dropped in the snow, whining, fur bristling, quivering with eagerness to renew the combat, but obedient to the fifth and most important command.

"They're just like football players," explained Buck. "If you don't holler 'Down' as soon as they stop moving they begin scrapping among themselves. They're the fightin'est dawgs in the world. I reckon I've refereed fifty battles this week and been bit a million times. You, Skookum, down!"

"Yes, and some day they'll kill each other and I'll have to dock you a hundred apiece for 'em!"

Thus spoke fur-clad authority in the person of James Montague, director. The loafers looked upon him with awe, and not without reason, for he cut a dashing figure. His parka was of reindeer skin, double thickness, the inner slip being of reindeer fawn, soft as velvet. The immense hood of the garment was lined with fox tails, and the skirt was bordered eight inches deep with patches of many-colored furs sewed in intricate patterns. This border represented months and perhaps years of patient labor by the light of a blubber lamp. It was the parka of a great chief and Montague wore

it like one, for was he not a czar? Then, too, he had cast himself for the heavy in the picture he was making, and, directorlike, he was dressing that villain in the best the company wardrobe afforded.

"Mush on, Buck!" said he. "You should have been started an hour ago."

Miss Manners, also in parka and furs, touched the director's arm.

"Jim," she said; "Gordan is in town."

"I know it," said Montague. "He left his card for me. Who told you about it?"

"He introduced himself last night." Montague read the meaning behind the words and cocked one eye at his leading woman.

"He did, did he? What's he like?"

"Just about what you said he'd be. I suppose he'll want to see you this morning."

"If he wants to see me," said the czar, "he can come to Donner Lake. I'll leave word for him." He plunged into the hotel and reappeared almost immediately, fuming. "I can't waste a whole morning's good light jawing with a man who doesn't know enough to stay in New York, where he belongs. Come on, folks! All aboard!"

By eleven o'clock Montague had completed five scenes and was rehearsing a sixth—a ticklish bit of action involving the upsetting of a loaded sledge upon a steep side hill. Four times he had attempted to get the desired effect, but without success, and he was perspiring under

the fox tails and using language. Perhaps this was why he did not see a fat gentleman roll out of a sleigh and flounder through the snow toward him.

"Try that again, Buck!" shouted Montague. "I want that sledge to turn clear over and start down the hill. And you go headfirst into the snow—and stay there!"

Buck started his dogs, and Montague, conscious of a puffing and wheezing at his elbow, turned to confront Mr. Gordan.

"Well?" said the director, who had forgotten all about the general Western manager. "What do you want?"

Mr. Gordan introduced himself, and it seemed that he wanted several things, including an explanation of Mr. Montague's conduct.

"You got my card; why didn't you wait at the hotel?"

"Because I can't waste the entire morning," said the director shortly. "No, no, Buck, not a bit like it! Rotten! Have I got to come up there and show you how to make a fall?"

"But I left my card," sputtered Mr. Gordan.

"I'll talk to you presently," said Montague; "just now I'm busy. Stand back, please."

In this Montague was within his rights. During the actual making of a picture the director is absolute and brooks no interference. A stage manager listens to the voice of the angel who pays for the production; a moving-picture director spends thousands to obtain novel effects,

and holds himself accountable only to the high court of results achieved. It is of record that a director once pulled the nose of a great magnate, pulled it in the presence of the entire company and five hundred extra people, and the magnate apologized. He had tried to tell the director his business.

“Stand back, please!” said Montague. “Now then, Buck——”

Mr. Gordan stood back. After a time he spied Miss Manners sitting on a blanket under a tamarack, and Montague was allowed to proceed in peace.

Noon came and the lunch was unpacked. Mr. Gordan drank scalding coffee out of a tin cup and gave further proof of the authority vested in him.

“I see that you had a six-horse team to come out here with,” said he. “Is that necessary?”

“What do you want these people to do—walk?” demanded Montague. “They’d get here so tired that they wouldn’t be able to work. In the time it would take ’em to walk it I can make three scenes worth a thousand apiece to the company. The coach costs me twenty dollars a day. Anything else you’d like to know?”

In the afternoon Mr. Gordan established unfriendly relations with another important member of the company. Snow stuff tests the patience as well as the resource of a camera man, and Charlie Dupree had been sorely tried that day. He had just succeeded in planting his

wooden triangle and setting the tripod upon it, preparatory to "shooting across" an expanse of virgin snow. Miss Manners, fleeing from the villain, was to cross that unbroken surface on snowshoes.

When everything was in readiness for the scene Mr. Gordan, thinking of something he believed Miss Manners would be pleased to hear, trudged heavily across the snow in the line of focus, and Dupree squealed with rage.

"Ah, now you've tracked it all up!" he cried. "Don't you see I got to make another set-up? If you want to walk round get behind the camera!"

"Don't be fresh, young man!" said Mr. Gordan sternly.

It was Miss Manners who said the last word on the subject of the general Western manager. Returning from her nightly spin at the Ice Palace she saw a light in the hotel parlor that Montague used as an office, and tapped on the door. Montague came out into the hall, a pipe between his teeth. His usually jolly face was haggard and lined with weariness. A director who is also an actor and a scenario author leads a hard life and burns his candle at both ends, physical and mental.

"Well, girly," said he, "what is it?"

"Jim," said the young woman, "I'm not finicky like some of these moving-picture actresses, am I?"

"Not a single finick!" said Montague

heartily. "You're a good little sport, Myrtle."

"I try to be; but there's a limit. I know the movie game, Jim—the woman's end of it. We all have to stand for unpleasantnesses once in a while, annoying little things from people who don't understand. It's all in the day's work; but——"

"See here, what's the matter?" interrupted Montague. "Tell your Uncle Jimmy, and he'll fix it up in two shakes."

"I don't know whether you can or not. It's Gordan."

"What?" ejaculated the director. "Has he been bothering you?"

"Only in little ways so far. He seems to think that his position with the company gives him privileges." The girl laughed nervously. "Jim, I don't in the least mind holding hands with a nice man—I rather like it; but this fat, soft creature—B-r-r-r! He gives me the shivers!"

Montague whistled softly to himself.

"I'm not a baby, Jim. I can take care of myself, as you know. If he was an ordinary masher I could slap his face and send him about his business; but he's the Western manager and that makes it difficult. He can make trouble for all of us, and he's the kind of a man that'll do it. How strong is he with Seligman?"

"Pretty strong, I'm told," said Montague ruefully. "He owns a chunk of stock in the concern; but if he owned it all he wouldn't have

any right to annoy the women in my company. I'll give him a good bawling-out the first thing in the morning."

"No, don't do that, Jim; there's a better way. I'll avoid him as much as possible. You see, he doesn't know any better. Chorus girls are the only stage people he knows anything about, and his ideas are wrong. He thinks that all he has to do is to flash his diamonds and make a conquest. Don't say a word to him, but keep your eye on him."

"I'd like to punch his head!" said Montague.

"He wouldn't know what he was being punched for, and you mustn't get in bad on my account, Jim. Perhaps he won't stay but a day or two longer. If I can't make him keep his distance I'll come to you."

"All right," said Montague. "But don't you take any more freshness from him, understand?"

"I won't. And don't stay up any later, Jim. You ought to be in bed. You look worn out."

"I'm fit as a fiddle!" said the director with a grin. "I could lick all the Gordan family—and I will if this fellow bothers you any more. Good-night, dear."

"Good-night, Jim, and thank you."

The director watched his leading woman until her door closed behind her. Then he turned back into his office, and sitting down at the table dropped his chin in his hands.

"This moving-picture game is like a lot of other things," he soliloquized. "It would be all right but for some of the people in it!"

III

"WHAT next? For the love of Mike, what next?" complained Buck Parvin, as he sat upon his sledge and eyed the seven malemutes reproachfully. "I thought I'd done about every fool stunt that a movie actor could do, but this snow stuff has got me treed and out on a limb!"

"What ails you now?" asked Ben Leslie, the property man. "Seems to me you're always kicking about something!"

"I reckon you'd kick, too, if Jim made you the fall guy," said Buck. "The first time we get a good snowstorm he wants me to lay out in it till I'm all covered over. I says to him: 'Be reasonable,' I says. 'Why can't you pile a lot of snow on me and get through with it quick?' 'Because,' he says, 'it's got to be drifted snow, and we can't pile it so it'll look natural.' 'Have a heart, Jim,' I says. 'I'll freeze sure!' He only laughed. 'You're supposed to be froze,' he says, 'and I want you to look the part when they dig you out!' Can you beat that, Ben? Jim is too darned technical to suit me. There ain't one man in a million that knows what snow looks like when it drifts

over a body, but Jim he makes his picture for that one man!"

"That's why he's an artist," said Ben.

"Maybe so," said Buck sullenly; "but if they go planting me in the snow for a couple of hours they're liable to have a sure-enough corpse when they dig me out."

"Well," said Ben, "Jim has got his troubles too."

Buck looked across toward the river, where the camera was planted. Montague was detailing the business of a scene to Miss Manners, and proceeding under difficulties by reason of the fact that the general Western manager was interrupting him with suggestions and loudly voiced opinions.

"I never saw Jim take so much gab from anybody," said Leslie. "I guess it's because this bird is a big mogul in the New York office."

"Ain't he the pest, though?" grinned Buck. "I've seen towns where they'd throw such a smoke on that feller that it would darken the sun for forty-eight hours. And fresh? Holy cat, do you know what he calls Myrtle? Little One! He does, on the level! He better not get too gay with that lady or she'll haul off and poke him in the nose. She's husky, that girl is, and hard as nails, and I've seen her give that fat man a couple of looks that would have stopped anybody with a nickel's worth of sense.

How does a man like that get a job managing anything?"

"I give it up," said Ben.

"Now, then, Myrtle," Montague was saying, "we'll rehearse that struggle scene. You've fired the last shot in your gun and I'm closing in on you. You stop on the bank of the river and face me, registering fear. Just before I step over the line to grab you, club your pistol—take it by the barrel. As I come to you with my arms out strike at me hard. I'll dodge it. When I take hold of you resist all you can—fight me away from you. It ought to run about thirty feet, and at the end of the scene you sink down in the snow in a faint."

Together they ran through the scene and Montague stepped toward the camera to give instructions to Dupree.

"One minute!" said Gordan. "I—I wasn't quite satisfied with the way you played that scene, Montague."

"You—what?" Montague turned on him like a flash.

"You didn't put enough snap into it to suit me," explained Gordan. "Not enough fire. I know how such a scene should be played, and there was something lacking. Miss Manners, she did fine; but your work—well, it didn't get across with me, that's all."

It was the last straw. Manager or no manager, this was the end. Montague opened his mouth, but before he could speak Miss Man-

ners was tugging at his parka. He turned to look at her and was arrested by a singular gleam in her eye. There was a reason for that gleam. Mr. Gordan, pursuing his usual system with "actresses," had passed from words to deeds. During the lunch hour he had attempted to kiss her behind a pine tree, and had laughed when she raged at the insult.

"You'll get over it, dearie," he had said. "They always do."

"Jim," said she sweetly, "if you will let Mr. Gordan show us what he means he may be able to suggest something that will strengthen the scene."

The general Western manager puffed out his chest.

"Now you're talking!" said he. "I can show you, all right. I don't know as I could put it into words exactly, but I could act it out for you, Montague. A little more fire; a little more snap. Get me?"

A swift glance passed between director and leading woman; the latter nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Go ahead!" said Montague gruffly.

Mr. Gordan stripped off his overcoat and tossed it behind him. Then he buttoned his cut-away coat and patted his chest.

"Now, then, girlie," said he, "get back there by the river bank and fight just as hard as you want to."

Miss Manners took up her original position,

the swift water of the Truckee River behind and below her, and turned to register fear.

"That's great!" said Gordan, removing his hat and throwing it after his overcoat. "Keep looking right at me, girlie! Now, Montague, here's the way I'd play this scene."

Mr. Gordan advanced over the side line, crouching as well as a fat man may, his pudgy hands hooked in front of him like claws. From a distance of five feet he sprang, which was not exactly what Miss Manners expected, and the revolver was pinned at her side. One fat arm encircled her waist, its mate wrapped itself about her throat. She struggled violently to free herself, but Gordan only laughed and held her closer.

"This is what I mean, Montague!" he panted, and forcing the girl's head back bent to kiss her. Montague leaped forward, but he was not needed. Miss Manners freed her right arm with a desperate jerk, and using the heavy revolver as a hammer struck with all her strength. The general Western manager grunted like a smitten ox, and reeling blindly backward plunged into ten feet of melted snow water.

Half an hour later a very wet and vastly uncomfortable fat man awoke, to find himself careening toward Truckee behind seven male-mutes.

"Don't wiggle so much!" commanded Buck Parvin. "I had to tie you on to keep you from

falling off. . . . What happened? Why, you forgot the business of that scene you was playing. You was to dodge when she swung the gun, and you didn't do it. . . . Huh? Why sure it was a accident! You don't think a lady like Miss Manners would bust you that way a purpose! I was standing right there and I heard Jim run over the scene with her. 'Hit at me hard,' he says. 'I'll dodge it.' Then you set Jim's cue out and went in to show him how, but you forgot to duck your head. It all comes of not sticking to your own game. I reckon you know plenty about regular stages that they have inside of theaters, but you don't sabe the movies. On the regular stage they only pretend to hit you. In this business the wallops you get are on the level. And then you're a manager. You ought to stuck to managing. Reminds **me** of a feller I used to know down in the Pecos country—Red-Eye Riley was his name. Red-Eye could ride a hawss in all the languages what is—Harry Brennan never did have nothing on that bird. Well, Red-Eye joins out with one of them rough-rider shows to be a actor. First day he worked he got to flirting with a pretty girl in the reserves, and was doing right well for himself till he got so interested in the girl that he forgot he was on a bad hawss, and he ain't been able to ride nothing but a wheelchair ever since. Now Red-Eye he would have been a good actor if he hadn't tried to make a mash. . . . Huh? **Hurry more**

and talk less? Why, yes, we'll hurry more if you say so, but don't holler if we have a spill. It's hard to keep one of these fool sleds right side up. Mush—mush on! Hi-yah-yah-yah! Little speed there, Skookum!"

It is rather difficult to keep a dog sledge on even keel. Given a fat man for a load, complications multiply. Malemutes are uncertain brutes. This may explain why Mr. Gordan took nine headers into snowdrifts and became involved in three desperate dogfights on the way to the hotel.

The same road was traveled later by James Montague and Myrtle Manners.

"Jim," said the young woman, "when I gave you the nod I didn't mean to hurt him—much. I meant to tap him on the head before he could get his hands on me and blame it on to the business of the scene. He—he needed a lesson. Then when he jumped at me and was so rough and nasty I think I would have killed him if I could, the beast!"

"He got what was coming to him," said the director grimly.

"And now there'll be trouble!" wailed the girl. "Do you think it would do any good to write Mr. Seligman exactly what happened and why?"

"Dave is a mighty decent old coot," said Montague, "but he's bound to listen to Gordan. I think there's a better way than a letter, but at any rate you needn't worry your head. Selig-

man won't do anything to me because he needs me in his business, and as long as I've got a company you've got a job. Is that plain to you?"

"Jim," said the leading woman, patting his arm, "you're an angel!"

"Uh-huh," said the director; "but most of my wing feathers have molted."

IV

MR. ISADORE GORDAN returned to Fifth Avenue with inflammatory rheumatism in his joints and a three-cornered cut on his forehead that promised to leave a permanent scar. He credited the rheumatism to Truckee's damp climate. The cut upon his forehead, he explained to David Seligman, was a memento of a railroad wreck in the Far West.

Mr. Gordan's verbal report consumed almost an entire morning and contained everything but recommendations to mercy. David Seligman, old and wise and an excellent judge of human nature, smoked black cigars and pondered before he rendered his verdict.

"Well, Izzy," said he, "you must have been a busy man. If I am to do what you say we will have no company left in Truckee at all. To begin with the camera man, he is fresh. Maybe so, but he is the first man to discover that keeping his camera frozen prevents static troubles.

He has saved us thousands of dollars by that trick alone, so he can be as fresh as he likes and keep his job. He might think of something else that will save us money. And this Buck Parvin, I know him well. Every time I go West he makes me laugh. I would keep him for that alone.

"With regard to Montague, you can't knock him to me and get away with it. Your personal troubles with him are nothing to mine. I fight with that fellow every time I see him, and then I raise his salary to keep him from thinking that I meant what I said. He is the best director in the country and he stays with us. That is final.

"Now about this leading woman—you may be right. She ain't a star and she owes everything to Montague. I have seen him work an hour with her on one scene until she played it to suit him. If you are sure you can get Miss Delmar away from the Elkay people I will agree to let Manners go. This much I will concede, Izzy; but you can't touch Montague or the rest of the company, so you might as well quit talking. Manners we can spare if we can replace her with Delmar."

An office boy appeared.

"Mr. Seligman," said he, "they're ready to run that snow stuff now. You said you wanted to see it."

"Come along, Izzy," said Seligman. "You ought to be interested in this. It's some that

you saw made. Montague writes me that he would like to have your opinion."

They went to the small projecting room, where for half an hour they watched snow scenes as they were thrown upon the screen—commenting, criticizing and commending. No connected story was told by the film; the reels that were shown were made up of miscellaneous scenes from three different pictures.

"Manners isn't so bad in this stuff," said Seligman. "That love scene now—that was well done and she got the points over in good shape."

"Too stiff—not natural enough," said Gordan.

"It was natural enough for me," said Seligman stubbornly. "There she is again!"

There flickered upon the screen the picture of a girl in parka and hood. Behind her was the dark, swiftly flowing Truckee River, and the far background was a snow-covered slope, ragged with tamarack, pine and fir. Mr. Gordan stirred uneasily in his chair.

"She's pretty anyway," said Mr. Seligman. "That's one point that you can't take away from her—her looks."

"She ain't as pretty as Delmar," said Gordan. "And Delmar is smarter."

"Manners is a nice little thing—a perfect lady," said Seligman. "I wonder why she's holding that pistol by the barrel? . . . Ah, now she registers fear. . . . Nothing the matter

with that acting, eh? . . . Hello, who's this?"

A fat gentleman in a cutaway coat came crouching into the picture. Mr. Gordan gasped. For an instant an unmistakable profile was silhouetted against the white background, and David Seligman shouted with laughter.

"Well, Izzy," he cried, "since when have you been an actor?"

"Stop that film!" bawled Gordan. "Stop it!"

"What for?" asked Seligman. "Go ahead and run it, boy; I want to see it."

Mr. Gordan subsided, gurgling. The fat gentleman on the screen moved again, closer to the girl.

"You look like you are getting ready to do the Apache dance with her," commented Seligman. "Were you trying to scare her to death?"

"I was showing Montague how to play the scene," muttered Gordan.

"You? You can't show that man anything about acting! He—Good Lord, what's this?"

There came the spring, the embrace and the scuffle. Mr. Seligman stopped chuckling and his voice grew stern.

"What's the idea, Izzy? Do you think you're a grizzly bear?"

The swaying bodies were clearly defined against the whiteness of the snow. David Seligman leaned forward; not a detail of that struggle escaped his keen eyes. It was also given to Mr. Gordan to see himself as others had

seen him, and the sight was not a pleasant one.

"Hit him, kid, hit him!" murmured Seligman. "Why don't you hit him?"

Slowly the fat man forced the girl's chin upward, and as he bent over her David Seligman gave vent to an ejaculation of disgust.

"You showing Montague how to play the scene! You just wanted an excuse to kiss the girl. Bah!"

Suddenly there was a flash of a fur-clad arm, the fat man's head snapped as if on a hinge, and Mr. Gordan saw himself reel over the bank and disappear with a mighty splash.

"Oh, good!" shouted Seligman. "Good for you, kid! Hoo-ray!"

"She hit me on purpose," mumbled Mr. Gordan, naming the particular bit of action that interested him the most. "Anybody can see she did. It was a frame-up!"

"Sure she hit you on purpose!" cried Seligman. "Bless her little heart, of course she did! Do you think because we make you a Western manager it gives you a license to pull stuff like that? You would have had no kick coming if she had shot you! And that's why you say she can't act, eh?"

An argument rose in the projecting room, waxed loud and lasted long. Tempers went to smash and the naked truth had an airing.

"I tell you this, Dave," shouted Gordan. "Whatever I did makes no never-minds with

me. She goes or I go, and that is all there is about it!"

David Seligman scratched his chin.

"Well, Izzy," said he, "I am sorry you put it that way, because now I wouldn't fire that little woman under any circumstances. Not if she was the worst actress in the world! I got to have better reasons than that she hit you on the head. I always said that she was a perfect lady. And so that was your train wreck? Ho, ho!"

Mr. Gordan's sudden resignation as general Western manager of the Titan Company provoked a great deal of comment in the moving-picture world and speculation as to the cause went wild and unbridled. A rumor traveling westward said that an unauthorized strip of film, appearing with the day's batch—perhaps by accident—had shuffled the seat checks of the mighty, but the young man who was in a position to deny or affirm continued to freeze his camera nightly and keep his own counsel. It took a point-blank question from Buck Parvin to get anything out of him.

"Kid," said the cowpuncher, "it was a smooth piece of work. I was standing right there at the time, and I didn't see Jim give you the office to turn the crank on his royal fatness. When was that little job cooked up?"

"It wasn't cooked at all," answered Charlie Dupree. "I'd been watching that lobster and

I knew what he was up to. I thought maybe Seligman would like to know too. You can put a man on the witness stand and he'll lie; but if you pull a moving picture on him—good night! Jim didn't know what I was going to do and he didn't see me swing round to get the focus, but he tumbled as soon as he heard the camera begin to click, and I guess that's why Gordan wasn't licked on the spot."

"I got to hand it to you," said Buck admiringly. "You're a bear!"

"Huh!" said Dupree. "I know action when I see it. Maybe that's why the old man raised my salary."

"He'd have raised mine, too, if there'd been any pictures of that sled trip back to Truckee," said Buck. "There was sure some action there! But I never have no luck. It's going to snow to-day and Jim is going to freeze me. If I'm dead when they dig me out you send a strip of the film to my girl, will you?"

“THIS IS THE LIFE!”

MR. ELMER GRIBBLE pecked at the heart of a cantaloupe and soberly regarded the vacant chair on the opposite side of the breakfast table. He was thinking of the time when his wife would not have trusted a servant to pour his morning coffee for him. Once on the backward trail, Mr. Gribble's memory slipped easily to the honeymoon period when there had been no servant to trust—the honeymoon, when Addie did her own cooking.

Mr. Gribble recalled the breaded veal cutlets of his early married life and his mouth watered. He was a very ordinary person, entirely human, and he found it hard to accustom himself to promiscuous parsley decorations and pink tissue-paper frills on the shank of a lamb chop. Prosperity had brought Elmer Gribble nothing which he would not have exchanged for the simple but solid comforts of the honeymoon days—mashed potatoes with brown country gravy, for instance.

Boggs, the butler, entered with stealthy tread

and noiselessly deposited a covered dish upon the table before Mr. Gribble.

"That'll be all," said the master of the house, and Boggs, murmuring deferentially, withdrew to the kitchen. Mr. Gribble did not like Boggs—never had liked him.

"He makes me nervous," was Gribble's usual complaint. "I like my bread with gravy on it and I haven't got the nerve to eat it with that lantern-jawed scarecrow hanging over me and watching every bite! . . . Oh, I know he's right about it! He's always right and that's what ails him. Bread and gravy may not be used in the best circles, but, confound it, Addie, I was raised on it and I like it! I wish you'd fire that fellow!"

But Boggs remained, Mrs. Gribble insisting that a manservant lent tone to the establishment. Mrs. Gribble had her own way in most things. Mr. Gribble offered futile suggestions, fussed a little and paid the bills, this last being the end for which he was created.

After Boggs had disappeared Mr. Gribble cautiously lifted one edge of the silver cover and a groan escaped him.

"Another omelet!" said he. "And I've got salesmen that I pay less money than Addie pays that infernal cook!"

Enter Adeline Gribble, almost forty, almost fat, yawning lazily into the sleeve of an elaborate dressing sack. A lace and ribbon boudoir cap did its best to conceal a hastily twisted

mass of blonde hair, the escaping wisps in strong contrast with the darkly penciled brows. The lady, passing behind her lord but by no means her master, bent and touched her lips to his bald spot.

“I thought you’d be gone by this time,” said she. “It isn’t a legal holiday, is it?”

“Addie,” said Mr. Gribble, suddenly, “do you remember the breaded veal cutlets that we used to have the first year we were married?”

Mrs. Gribble shuddered and rolled her eyes theatrically.

“Never mention that year to me!” she exclaimed. “When I think of the hours I put in over that miserable gas stove, I declare it makes me ill. Mercy! I wouldn’t work that hard again for the best man on earth!”

“You didn’t seem to mind it so much in those days,” suggested the husband.

“That was because I wasn’t used to anything better.” There were moments when Mrs. Gribble forgot herself and was frank. “I worked like a slave because you couldn’t afford to hire a girl, but I notice the minute you got able we had one. A wife ought to help her husband when he needs it but after he gets his start and can afford a cook and servants——”

“Of course!” interrupted Mr. Gribble. “Of course. Have I ever refused you anything?”

“It wouldn’t be healthy for you, my dear,” smiled the lady, leisurely beginning on her cantaloupe. She was as soft and dainty and indo-

lent as a pampered white cat and Mr. Gribble watched her face with the anxious manner of one who scents an unpleasant topic in the air.

"I've spoiled you, Addie," said he. It was an unfortunate remark.

Mrs. Gribble sniffed.

"I'm not the spoiling kind," said she, "and you know it. I might even become very famous and it wouldn't spoil me."

Mr. Gribble's head went back between his shoulders as if he had received a blow.

"For pity's sake! You haven't got that fool idea in your head yet, have you?"

"It's not a fool idea, my dear," said Mrs. Gribble with calmness. "It's a very sensible idea. There's many a leading woman who hasn't my natural talent. Nothing but my voice kept me off the stage when I was a girl. I ruined it squalling 'Cash!' when I was in that wretched department store——"

"Oh, don't say that," interrupted Mr. Gribble, vainly hoping to turn the conversation into other channels. "Don't say that. It was there that you met me, my dear. Do you remember——"

"Absolutely ruined it," continued Mrs. Gribble, thus proving herself a lady of single ideas and simple mental processes, "but now that the movies have come in, the voice doesn't matter. It's the face and the acting. Last night I went to three picture shows. I saw that big five-reel feature at the Coliseum and the woman

who took the part of the adventuress was terrible—simply terrible! If I couldn't do better than that I'd be ashamed of myself. She didn't get her points over at all—no more expression in her face than there is in a piece of putty! Anne Amber had the other woman's part. I can't see for the life of me why they're always raving about her. They say she's got film charm and screen magnetism and all that sort of thing. Rubbish! She's got big eyes and when you've said that you've said everything! She can't act, and thin? Why, it's pitiful to see her! If people like that can get big reputations, why can't I?”

“Now, Addie, you're not really taking this thing seriously, are you?” Mr. Gribble's face expressed deep concern. “Why should you want to paint yourself up like a cigar store Indian and cavort around in front of a camera? Haven't you got everything you want? A big house and servants and two automobiles and——”

“Everything, Elmer,” said Mrs. Gribble, “but a career.”

“A career!” exploded her husband. “What business have you got with a career? *I'm* your career!”

Mrs. Gribble smiled pityingly.

“You don't understand,” said she. “A woman has got to have some aim in life. That's why so many of 'em join Shakespeare Clubs and take up suffrage. I'm tired of doing noth-

ing but amusing myself—tired of being idle. Sometimes it seems as if I can't stand it another day."

"If that's the case," said Mr. Gribble, "you might go out in the kitchen and teach that cook a few things. There's a regular job for you, any time you want to tackle it."

"I think I see myself!"

"Well," said Mr. Gribble, "it isn't as hard work as being an actress, Addie."

"Next week," said Mrs. Gribble, calmly ignoring this remark, "I am going over to the Titan Studio and have a talk with Mr. Montague. I've seen him in the pictures so often that I feel as if I know him. I'm going to ask him if he can find a place for me."

"You're what?" ejaculated Mr. Gribble, startled.

"Mr. Montague is a director. He uses a number of people. Directors are always in search of types——"

"Let 'em search, but you keep away from those places!" Mr. Gribble actually raised his voice.

"Why, Elmer," said the wife, "are you prepared to take the responsibility for interfering with my development? Are you?"

"You bet I'm prepared!" said Mr. Gribble. "You ain't going to develop into a darned fool if I have anything to say about it! My wife—an actress? I won't stand for it, and you

might just as well hang up your fiddle now, d’ye hear?”

Warm words followed, and in the end Mrs. Gribble wept and called heaven to witness a very unhappy woman. Heaven had already witnessed a very unhappy man.

“I d-d-don’t see how you can be so c-c-cruel!” sobbed Mrs. Gribble, snuffling behind her handkerchief.

“I don’t either, Addie,” said her spouse, miserably, “but it’s for your own good.”

“I w-w-wanted to go into this with your c-c-consent,” quavered Mrs. Gribble, “but now you force me to g-g-go without it!”

Mr. Gribble threw up both hands and left the room. He recognized defeat when he met it, even if he did not salute it with a bow.

Again the Gribbles at table, though not in the breakfast room this time. Mr. Gribble had been late for dinner but his carefully rehearsed excuses were not needed. The lady of his household was so filled with important tidings that she could not possibly have contained a syllable of reproach. The news began to spill over the edges as Mr. Gribble entered the room.

“It’s all settled!” she cried. “I’m to start next Thursday!”

Mr. Gribble tucked his napkin into the front of his waistcoat and waved Boggs from the room. Then he asked the question which opened the flood-gates.

"Start what?" said he.

"Why, work, of course—a special two reel feature for the Titan Company—star part, Elmer, think of that!—saw Mr. Montague to-day—oh, my dear, you must meet him—he's exactly the sort of man you'd like and so clever—he had a scenario which exactly fits my personality—the very thing for me—he said as soon as he saw me that I was the perfect type—and he was on the verge of giving up hope of producing it because he hadn't been able to get the woman to look the lead and play it too—the minute I walked into his office he knew that I was the one he'd been hunting for—just as quick as that—didn't even have to ask him for an engagement—he offered this part to me of his own accord—it's a mining camp story with a strong heart interest and wonderful opportunities for emotional acting—he says no young girl could possibly play it and——"

"Wait! Wait!" Mr. Gribble waved his hands over his head. "That's enough! Now what in Sam Hill is this all about, Addie?"

"Why, I've got an engagement!"

"A job, you mean."

"An engagement," corrected Mrs. Gribble. "I'm to have the star part in the picture!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Mr. Gribble. "So soon?"

"Now, Elmer, let's not go all over that again," said the wife. "It won't do the least good. My mind is made up."

Mr. Gribble sighed and selected a fork—the wrong one.

"Well," said he, heavily, "if you must, you must, though why you want to make yourself ridiculous is more'n I know."

"I won't make myself ridiculous, my dear," said the lady, "and you needn't be afraid that I'll disgrace you. I'm taking a stage name, of course. Adeline Aldine. Mr. Montague thought that would be better than Gribble."

"Oh, he did, did he?" The worm turned sharply at this bit of information. "Too bad about that. I suppose you'll still use the name of Gribble when you're having things charged at the stores, eh?" This sarcasm was wasted.

"Certainly. Aldine is only a stage name. Don't be silly."

"I hope that you told this Montague that you're a married woman!"

"Why should I tell him anything of my private affairs? And, anyway, a big director like Mr. Montague hasn't time for anything but business."

"He better not have!" growled Mr. Gribble, and his wife squealed with delight.

"Why, Elmer, would you really be jealous of me?" she cried.

Mr. Gribble ceased investigating his shrimp cocktail and spoke with feeling.

"I'm jealous of anything that takes you away from me," said he. "I'm jealous of this crazy notion of yours, Addie. But since you've set

your heart on it and you're determined to try it, I won't stand in your way. You'll have to have your fling at it and then you'll find that your home is a pretty good place after all. Go ahead, Addie, but don't expect me to wish you luck!"

"You're a darling!" said Mrs. Gribble, blowing him a kiss. "I've always said there never was a man just like you, Elmer!"

"M-well," said Mr. Gribble, slowly, "maybe there's more to me than appears on the surface."

II

ON Wednesday afternoon there was considerable bad language at the studio of the Titan Company. The name of James Montague, director, came in for frequent mention and Buck Parvin, moving picture cowpuncher, voiced a general sentiment.

"Talk about your slave drivers!" said he. "Jim Montague can play Simon Legree without a makeup—all he needs is the bull-whip. Last Monday he told me that I wouldn't have to show up here to-morrow and on the strength of that I framed up a little trip to the beach and asked my girl to go along. Jim waits until to-day and then changes his mind. 'All members of the company on the job at eight o'clock!' My girl is kind of haughty and high-spirited, she is. If I make a date with her, I got to keep

it or dig up a better alibi than I've had yet. I don't reckon she'll stand for this. Think I could sue Jim for alienatin' her affections away from me, Ben?"

Ben Leslie, the property man, was not informed upon the legal point, but he was positive about some other points which he mentioned.

"Something has happened to Jim's schedule," said he, "but I don't know what it is. He expected to loaf Thursday and Friday, but this morning he handed me a long list of junk that he wants first thing to-morrow morning. A kitchen set, a red-hot stove and a dishpan full of pancake batter. He says the hotter the stove the better. Now what do you know about that?"

"Not a thing," said Buck, "except that he won't need it if this weather holds. Those pancakes will just naturally fry in the sun. But seems to me I heard that this picture was going to be a costume affair."

"It is," said Ben. "Shirts of mail, tin helmets and all that sort of stuff. That's why I can't figure out why Jim wants a mop, a scrubbing brush, a washtub and boiler, laundry soap and a rubbing board. Oh, yes, and some dirty clothes."

"Huh!" said Buck. "Jim must be going to stage the beginnin' of some of our best families! I got a lot of dirty clothes up to my room. If this scenario calls for a sure-enough cleanin' I'll bring 'em along."

"You will not," said Ben. "If anybody is going to beat the laundry out of some dough, it will be me. Nothing like taking advantage of the realism in a moving picture."

"Yeh," said Buck, "if they're goin' to have pancakes on tap here to-morrow, I see where I save lunch money."

"You?" chuckled Ben. "You never saved a nickel in your life!"

"I know it," said the cowpuncher. "All silver is quicksilver to me and the only stuff that ever slips between my fingers any faster is gold. I'm like a friend of mine named Billy Williams. Billy used to say that he was born without a nickel and still had it. Well, so long. I'm goin' to break the news to my girl. The feller that invented the telephone sure saved the rest of us a lot of hair, eh?"

III

THE arrival of Mrs. Gribble at the studio was something of an event. At seven-thirty came an express wagon and a solemn-visaged mulatto woman who superintended the unloading of two trunks and three suitcases. Ben Leslie, tinkering with an old-fashioned cook stove, was the only human in sight at that unearthly hour and to him the mulatto woman appealed.

"Yere's Miss Aldine's stuff. I got to git it unpacked right away. Whah do it go?"

The promptness with which Ben answered the question indicated that he had received definite information of some sort. He led the way to the smallest, stuffiest dressing room in the line, and opened the door. It was unoccupied save by two cockroaches, scurrying in agitated circles.

“Land o’ Goshen!” ejaculated the woman. “Miss Addie, she gwine dress in dishyer nasty li’l cubby-hole? Why, dey ain’ room to hang her gownds, let ’lone me an’ her! Dis de bes’ ’commodations y’all got fo’ a leadin’ lady? Common folks mus’ have to dress in de street, I reckon. . . . Oh, well, show me a broom till I sweep up dis trash!”

Promptly at eight o’clock an electric coupé drew up at the street door and Mrs. Gribble descended, faultlessly attired in a blue walking suit, with turban to match. Buck Parvin eyed both lady and coupé with speculative interest.

“Walks like a tragedy queen,” was his comment, “but drives up to the door in her own car.” Then, after thought: “It can’t be done!”

It became evident that the stranger knew her way to Montague’s office and the mystery deepened.

“She’s been here before,” said Buck. “Maybe it’s a society queen, wanting to see how she looks on a screen. Maybe it’s commercial stuff. Ben ought to know. I’ll ask him.”

Mr. Montague nodded approvingly at sight

of the newest member of his company, but wasted little time in idle conversation. He was, indeed, all business, and spoke in brisk, clipped sentences.

"Ah, Miss Aldine! Prompt, I see. Dressing room eleven, please. The first scene shows you as the keeper of a boarding house in a mining town—a hard-working woman in reduced circumstances. It's a kitchen scene and you are cooking breakfast for the men. Change at once, please."

"But, Mr. Montague," protested the lady, "don't you think I should know something more about the story—the plot—or how can I do the part justice? You ought to tell me——"

"Not necessary at all," interrupted the director, bending over a typewritten document. "I never allow my actors to read the script. It only confuses 'em and they get their ideas mixed with mine. I will outline each scene as we come to it—explain the business and rehearse the action. The first thing you must learn is to do exactly as you are told. No questions. No objections. Implicit and immediate obedience. Oh, Jennings! Show Miss Aldine to her dressing room. And remember, not too much makeup on the face—about as you are, I should say—but dress a boarding-house keeper in reduced circumstances. Change quickly, please. The stage is waiting for you."

"Is he always—that way?" asked Mrs. Gribble, as she meekly followed Montague's assist-

ant across the stage toward the dressing rooms.

"Huh!" said Jennings. "He's mild this morning—for him. If you want to hear him cut loose, talk back to him or keep him waiting on a scene. He drives a company harder than any man in the world, but he gets results. Sometimes we do forty scenes a day."

After the lady had disappeared, Montague strolled out upon the great stage. The kitchen setting was complete, the carpenter was at work upon a parlor interior, the stove was drawing well and Ben Leslie, who made his boast that he had never yet been asked to do an impossible thing, was mixing an immense quantity of batter in a dishpan, measuring milk and water with a practiced hand. Buck Parvin stood at his elbow, offering advice. A stagehand rushed up to Montague.

"What's this about no diffusers this morning, Mr. Montague?"

"Don't want 'em," said the director. "We want all the sun we can possibly get. The hotter the better. And remember what I told you last night. I'll murder the man who laughs."

"Yes, sir," said the stagehand.

"Oh, Buck!" called Montague.

Parvin approached, grinning.

"Go and borrow Jennings' dress suit. Put on a black mustache and get a cigarette and a cane."

"Aw, say," wheedled Buck, "let me in on this, Jim. Who is the beautiful lady?"

"She thinks she's an actress and so far as you're concerned, she is one. Get me? Do exactly what I tell you, don't burlesque anything and ask no questions."

"And you won't come through?" said Buck.

"I'll come through with a right swing if you don't get into that clawhammer."

"I don't know where I'm going," said Buck, cheerfully, "or why, but I'm on my way. Gid-dap!"

In the meantime temperament, the eternal feminine and the stern realities of stage life were clashing in an already overcrowded dressing room. Budding ambition about to burst into bloom alone kept the eternal feminine from tears after Mrs. Gribble had squeezed herself into her narrow quarters.

"What a dreadful place!" she cried. "Quick, Martha! My pink house dress and boudoir cap. Do hurry! The stage is waiting."

"De stage kin wait, Miss Addie," said the mulatto woman, calmly. "It kain't go nowhar 'thout y'all on it, I reckon. Yo' 'spect I'm gwine th'ow yo' cloze onto yo' any whichaway? A actress got to look like quality folks."

Followed a period of breathless exertion which was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Hurry, Miss Aldine! We are waiting on you!"

"Coming!" cried Mrs. Gribble, frantically

powdering her nose. “The cap, quick, Martha! That’s the director himself! Just a minute, Mr. Montague!”

The one minute lengthened into seven before a pink silk vision appeared upon the stage, aflutter with lace and ribbons. Being entirely a woman, Mrs. Gribble was prepared to create a sensation and she did, but the sensation was not exactly of the sort which she had expected.

Jimmy Montague was standing by the camera, conferring with Charlie Dupree, the Titan Company’s film wizard. Hearing the tap of high-heeled slippers, the director whirled in his tracks and Mrs. Gribble’s conception of a boarding-house keeper in reduced circumstances smote him in its gorgeous entirety. Montague staggered and tore his hair.

“Not a bit like it!” he shouted. “Is that your idea of a kitchen slavey, Miss Aldine? You are cooking for twenty miners in Blue Butte, Montana! You don’t own a scrap of silk and you’ve never seen a high-heeled slipper in your life! Go back and take those fluffy-ruffles off and dress the part!”

“I—I’m sorry,” said Mrs. Gribble, humbly. “I thought——”

“I’ll do the thinking for you!” stormed Montague. “Go back and put on a gingham dress, a dirty one for preference. . . . You haven’t one? Wait a minute!” He raced across the stage and plunged into the wardrobe room, returning immediately with a checkered atrocity

known as a Mother Hubbard and a pair of knitted slippers.

"Take off those corsets," he commanded, "and do your hair up in a little knob on the back of your neck! It's contrast I'm after, woman, contrast! I want you to make yourself just as unattractive as possible because in the second reel we show you in your mansion on Fifth Avenue—the butterfly escaped from the chrysalis! As an artist, you must learn to subordinate everything to art—even your personal appearance. It's contrast I must have! Now hurry!"

Much abashed, Mrs. Gribble returned to her dressing room where she wept and explained matters to Martha, who was unpacking the suitcases. The faithful servitor listened with open mouth and saucer eyes.

"Miss Addie, yo' ain' neveh gwine get yo' picture tooken in dis rag?" said she.

"I must. The director says so," wailed the poor lady.

"I'd direct him!" snapped Martha. "Yo' lemme go talk to dat man!"

This time the wait was a long one, but when the Blue Butte boarding-house keeper appeared she was wearing the Mother Hubbard and her hair was neatly coiled at the back of her neck. Montague surveyed her critically.

"Well, that's some better," said he, grudgingly, "but you look too clean—too tidy. Oh, Langdon!"

The scenic artist whooped from his work room.

“Send a stooge here with a brush and some black paint,” ordered Montague. A disreputable looking youth obeyed the summons. “Slop that dress up,” said the director. “And you might put a little dab on her nose while you’re about it. That hair will never do, either.” He laid violent hands upon the neat coil and shook it this way and that until the loose ends appeared in a golden aureole and one braid hung down the lady’s back.

“That’s more like it,” said Montague. “In a picture, we strive for absolute fidelity to life. You are an overworked woman; you have no time to spend on primping—boy, put a little paint on these hands!”

While Langdon’s apprentice splashed away with his brush, Mrs. Gribble found time to look about her. The stage was filling up with the members of the company and her heart leaped as she recognized her film favorites in the flesh—handsome Jack La Rue, the leading man, and Myrtle Manners, the leading woman. She even recognized Buck Parvin, in spite of the almost impenetrable disguise of evening dress, mustache and cane. These were the real actors, the movie stars, and they were to appear in her support! Their listless half-interested attitude went far to convince her that everything which was happening to her was part of the routine

and all in the day's work. The thought comforted her immeasurably.

"Now then, to the stove, Miss Aldine!"

She drew a deep breath and advanced, one eye upon the camera. Under skilful stoking the ancient wood-burner was throwing off a surprising amount of heat. Even the stage-hands gave it a wide berth.

"You are making pancakes," said Montague, consulting his script. "By the way, I am assuming that you know how to cook?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Gribble. "I can cook."

"Good!" said Montague. "But can you flip a pancake in the air? That is purely a western trick. It comes under the head of atmosphere, local color. Do you know how to do that?"

"I never tried it," said Mrs. Gribble.

"Try it now. We'll rehearse the scene. First you grease the pan with the bacon rind. Then you pour the batter. When the times comes to turn the cake you pick up the frying pan, so, and toss the cake into the air. That stamps you at once as a western woman. This is one of the first scenes in the picture and I want as much atmosphere in it as possible. Try it, please."

Mrs. Gribble bent over the stove. The terrific heat made her gasp, but obedient to stage directions, she greased the pan, spooned out the batter and leaned over the fiery furnace until her very soul seemed to be shriveling in the blast.

"It's about ready now," said Montague. "Flip it!"

Now those who have tried it know that flipping a pancake is an art acquired only by long practice. Mrs. Gribble's first attempt splashed upon the floor.

"Too bad," said Montague. "Make another, please, and save all the cakes. We will need them later for the breakfast scene."

A second attempt fell upon the stove, contributing an unappetizing odor. The third, fourth and fifth also met with disaster. Mrs. Gribble's face was crimson where it was not black; her makeup was furrowed with tiny rivulets; she was rapidly being reduced to a liquid state and all the while Montague, in the shade and not too close to the stove, was patience itself.

"You must keep on until you learn. Again, please," and he spoke of the sacrifices necessary for art's sake. At last the perspiring martyr mastered the technique and the camera man took his place at the crank.

"Now we'll make it," said Montague. "Ready—action—closer over the stove, Miss Aldine!—go!"

The camera clicked as a camera will even when the magazine is empty, and Mrs. Gribble bent bravely over the despised frying pan. The batter bubbled and widened on the greased surface, grew firm and the bubbles changed to tiny holes. Mrs. Gribble grasped the handle firmly,

a toss and a jerk sent the cake flying into the air, it described a perfect half circle and fell back into the pan——

“Stop!” yelled Montague. “You looked at the camera and registered triumph! You must never look at the camera, never! Do it again, please, and watch nothing but the pan. Ready?”

At last the director announced himself as pleased and Mrs. Gribble collapsed into a chair, panting for breath and mopping her face with the sleeve of her Mother Hubbard.

“Next we have a parlor scene,” said Montague, briskly. “Your ball dress, please, and at once.”

Jennings pounded on her door at least half a dozen times before Mrs. Gribble appeared. She was entirely satisfied with herself until she felt the estimating eye of the director upon her.

“Not so bad,” said Montague, glancing at the Paquin gown. “Your shoulders are a little beefy, though. . . . Oh, Buck!”

“That’s me!” answered Parvin, swaggering forward, twirling a cane.

“And this is Mr. Parvin!” gushed the lady. “Do you know, I’ve seen you do so many wonderful things—on the screen, of course—that I feel as if——”

“Attention, please!” said Montague. “Now this is the business of the scene. You are in your drawing room in New York. This man holds the secret of your past. He comes to you

threatening exposure. You plead for mercy. He laughs. You drag yourself to him on your knees. You seize his hands and weep. He spurns you and hurls you to the floor. Then he exits. Rehearse it, please!”

With much prompting and advice, Mrs. Gribble struggled through the scene. Buck’s natural weakness for the softer sex asserted itself in the spurning process and Montague yapped savagely.

“I said hurl her, Parvin, and I want you to do it! Slam her down hard!”

“Real hard?” asked Buck.

“You bet your life. You’re not only a bad man; you’re a brute. Remember that. Understand, Miss Aldine, when a moving picture actor takes a fall, it’s a real fall. That’s the only way we can make it register. No slides and no subterfuges. Don’t try to save your dress and fall as hard as you can. Again, please.”

Five times the lady dragged herself after Buck, was by him spurned and hurled to the floor and at last Montague announced himself as satisfied. Mrs. Gribble was more than satisfied. Art is art, but a bruised hip is another matter and so is a ruined gown.

“I—I’m all out of breath!” gasped Mrs. Gribble. “It—it’s hard work, isn’t it?”

“This emotional actin’ ain’t nothing,” grinned Buck. “Wait till we get to the stunt stuff. You never can tell what a director’ll ask

you to do. Once I played a outlaw and it was in the script that I had to be lynched——”

“Mercy!” exclaimed Mrs. Gribble.

“They put a rope round my neck, tied it to a limb an’ led my hawss out from under me. I come pretty near chokin’ to death before Jim got the effect he wanted and then the darned censors cut the hangin’ scene plumb out of the film. This emotional stuff is a cinch! Wait till they ask you to fall off a hawss or something like that!”

“Hurry, Miss Aldine!” called Montague. “Get back into that gingham thing. You’re in the boarding house again.”

The rest of the morning was a cruel nightmare. Mrs. Gribble choked in the steam above a boiler, she draped herself over a tub and renewed her acquaintance with the corrugated surface of a washboard, she ironed four shirts, she scrubbed a floor, she washed a mountain of dirty dishes and dried them upon an unclean towel. Every soft muscle ached, every dainty instinct cried out against these outrages. Her spirit alone sustained her. She was thinking of the second reel and hoping that the promised contrast would be striking enough to make up for the physical discomforts of the first.

“Half an hour for lunch!” called Montague. “Get busy on that dining room set, boys!”

Mrs. Gribble dragged herself to the dressing room and fell in a limp heap upon her trunk.

"Yo' call dat actin'?" demanded Martha.
"Looks mo' to me like plain pot-wrastlin'!"

"It will show contrast," sighed Mrs. Gribble.

"An' dat ain't all!" sniffed Martha. "Yo' wouldn't even let Mist' Gribble see yo' in a nasty rag like whut yo' got on an' dese folks done tooken yo' picture in it fo' eve'ybody to laugh at! Dat's contrast, I reckon! I declah to goodness, Miss Addie, I dunno whut yo' see in dishyer movie business to be so crazy 'bout!"

"Be quiet, Martha!" snapped Mrs. Gribble.
"Your opinion is not called for!"

"Yas'm, Miss Addie, but I'm tellin' yo'——"

"Will you hush? Take this filthy thing off and get me a kimono."

In an inconceivably short space of time Montague's fist was hammering on the door.

"All ready for you, Miss Aldine! As you were in the last scene, please!"

Mrs. Gribble groaned as Martha assisted her into the loathed Mother Hubbard, and she limped out to serve twenty miners with cold, greasy pancakes, an unsavory mess of pork and cabbage and steaming coffee. It was some slight satisfaction to find that the handsome La Rue was one of her boarders and Buck Parvin's eyes twinkled at her above a thicket of moving picture whiskers, but the presence of professional talent was more than offset by the odor of pork and cabbage which almost made Mrs. Gribble ill. She was thankful that it was her duty to

serve the food and not to eat it, but in this she reckoned without James Montague, director.

"You will eat in the kitchen, Miss Aldine," said he.

And eat she did, though her stomach revolted and her soul rebelled. Mrs. Gribble had never liked pork and cabbage, even when she knew who cooked it.

"Is there—very much more of this?" she asked.

"Why, we've only begun," said Montague. "You'll have a change now, though. We'll do some location stuff. The boys are all in their costumes so we might as well make the chases."

"Chases?" said Mrs. Gribble.

"It won't be a real moving picture without chases," said Montague. "Audiences like 'em and expect 'em. This is where you get a chance to show how fast you can run."

"I—I don't think I can run very fast," said Mrs. Gribble.

"You'll have to." Montague referred to his script. "See all these figures? They represent chases. The miners suspect that you have sold information to a Wall Street syndicate. They drive you out of the camp. You flee into the hills. They follow. . . . Better put on some thick shoes with low heels and take along a cloak to wear between times so that you won't catch cold. Don't change that gingham dress. It's a good thing to run in."

"I haven't done any running since I was a girl," said Mrs. Gribble.

"You'll soon get hardened to it," said Montague, encouragingly. "A moving picture actress has to be a good runner. It's one of the first things she learns. You will be ready to leave in my auto in five minutes and you may take your maid with you."

Mrs. Gribble learned to run. She ran until she could run no more, always with a mob of miners in close pursuit. She ran through the streets of small suburban towns and the inhabitants swarmed to the sidewalks with ironical cheers and yells of "Go to it, Fatty! We're bettin' on you!" She ran on mountain roads covered with sharp, flinty stones; she ran through deep sand; she ran uphill, downhill and 'cross country. Art is long but Mrs. Gribble's breath was short and when it failed her she begged for mercy.

"I—I c-c-can't run another step!" she wailed. "I simply can't!"

"You're a bit fat for this sort of thing," remarked Montague, impersonally, "but you'll soon sweat it off. You waddle too much now; I'm afraid an audience would mistake these scenes for comedy relief. Get your wind and then I'll rest you with some climbing stuff."

The climbing stuff was even more tiring than the runs. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak and soft and oh, so weary!

"Straight up that hill and over the skyline,"

said Montague. "We'll tilt the camera and keep you in the picture. Ready—action—go!"

Up, up, up she went, spurred on by yells from the heartless director and howls from the blood-thirsty miners.

"Faster! Faster!" shouted Montague. "Make it snappy, Miss Aldine, make it snappy!"

Sick, dizzy and blinded by the streaming perspiration, Mrs. Gribble endeavored to make it snappy. She put the last ounce of her strength into a desperate attempt to reach the summit of the hill, but a loose boulder turned as she stepped on it and she fell heavily, rolling into a patch of whitethorn. Sputtering incoherently, Martha scrambled to the rescue, followed by Montague and Buck Parvin.

"Your maid spoiled a great scene by running in on it," said the director. "Take a rest and then we'll try it again."

"Look yere, man," snapped Martha, "whut yo' tryin' to do, kill dis lady? Kain't yo' see she's all in?"

"That will do, Martha!" panted Mrs. Gribble. "Hold your tongue!"

"Lots of gameness but no sense," murmured Buck Parvin. "I've seen men that was troubled that way but mighty few women. . . . Well, ma'am, this is the life!"

Mr. Gribble spoke the truth when he said that there was more to him than appeared upon the

surface. Not least of his uncatalogued virtues was the ability to see much, say little and bide his time. Greater men than Elmer Gribble have lacked this gift.

When his wife answered him in monosyllables and dozed at the dinner table he said nothing; when she decided to retire immediately after dessert, he sat alone and grinned at the smoke as it curled upward from his cigar. Later he poked his head in at the door of his wife's room.

“Tired, Addie?” said he.

“Not in the least,” sighed Mrs. Gribble. “I’m only relaxing, that’s all.”

“You like this movie business then?” said he.

“Simply mad about it!”

“Ah hah,” said Mr. Gribble.

“Yas’m, Miss Addie,” said Martha, “but y’all betteh lemme rub yo’ wif dis liniment or yo’ won’ be able to act none to-morrer.”

Mr. Gribble, thus banished to the hall, executed something remotely resembling a double-shuffle.

IV

ON the morning of the second day the electric coupé delivered a cargo of aches and pains at the Titan Studio and Buck, watching the lady’s progress, rolled a cigarette and mused aloud.

"She walks like that lame camel out to the animal farm," said he. "Yes, she sure favors that nigh hoof a lot. . . . Good mornin', Miss Aldine. How do you like actin' as far's you've gone?"

"It's lovely!" said Mrs. Gribble. "This is the life, Mr. Parvin!"

"Yeh," said Buck to himself as the lady hobbled into Montague's office, "this is the life, you bet, but not for fat people."

Again Mr. Montague was all business.

"Ah! Gingham again this morning, please, Miss Aldine!"

Mrs. Gribble was disappointed and showed it.

"I thought we might begin the second reel to-day," she pouted.

"Did you? Why, we've hardly begun the first one. It has something like seventy scenes in it. We haven't even touched the stunt stuff yet."

Stunt stuff! Mrs. Gribble recalled Buck Parvin's cheerful prophecies with a slight sensation of uneasiness. There was an anxious note in her voice as she spoke.

"Are—are the stunts any harder than the ones I did yesterday?"

Montague laughed.

"You didn't do any stunts yesterday," said he. "That was just the usual run of picture stuff. A stunt is something that requires muscle—nerve—courage. Of course, I try to eliminate as many chances of injury as I can. I

do not like to have our people hurt. In case they are, the company stands the hospital bills, but even so, a stunt actress is hard to find. Most women lack your courage. I will be frank with you, Miss Aldine. In straight parts you will probably never amount to anything because your acting is very bad, but the stunts will carry you through. If you stick to me, I will make you the leading stunt actress of America.”

This was news indeed, but it did not make Mrs. Gribble happy. It made her distinctly uncomfortable.

“And what will I be expected to do?” she asked.

“Oh, pretty much everything in the athletic line,” answered Montague, carelessly. “Ride a horse, swim, do a jump once in a while, work with wild animals——”

“Oh!” cried Mrs. Gribble. “I never was on a horse in my life, I can’t swim and I’m deathly afraid of animals!”

“You can learn to ride and swim and you’ll get used to animals,” said Montague. “Just as it happens you won’t have to ride or swim in this picture and the scenario does not call for animals. The stunts are easy ones. You will escape from a burning building by means of a rope—the boys will tie it round you and let you down to the ground—you will climb a few fences and do one falling jump into water—oh, that’s all right. It won’t be over your head, Miss Aldine. Perhaps it would be more spec-

tacular if you could manage a head-first dive——”

“I can’t! I can’t! I know I can’t!” cried Mrs. Gribble.

“Never say you can’t do anything until you’ve tried,” said the director. “You will jump on a moving train and off again; you will be in a taxicab collision and a few little things like that. Positively no danger, I assure you, but would you believe that eight women refused to play this part before you turned up? They hadn’t the nerve.”

“I—I think you might have told me!” said Mrs. Gribble.

“I’m telling you now,” said Mr. Montague.

The afternoon shadows were long among the trees of a wooded valley when two men crashed through the underbrush and stood upon the edge of a black pool of water, its surface covered with weeds and moss. This particular spot is an old friend and favorite location of moving picture directors and has appeared in countless films, sometimes as an impenetrable swamp, sometimes as the scene of bloody conflict, but more often as the spot where the unfortunate comedian takes his involuntary bath.

“It’s the last hurdle,” said one of the men. “If this doesn’t finish her, I swear I don’t know what to do next.”

“Too game for her own good,” murmured the other. “When we let her down from the

roof and left her hanging in the air for fifteen minutes while Charlie fooled with the camera, I thought she'd surely quit. And she climbed those fences like a scairt cat. What's the idea, Jim?"

"The idea is a cure for film infatuation," said the other. Then, lifting up his voice: "This way with the camera!"

Other figures drew near and last of all came a woman, worn and weary and clad in a gingham dress. She limped painfully to the edge of the pool, looked at the water and the weeds and then at James Montague.

"I'm to jump into this—this mudhole?" said she.

"Yes, Miss Aldine. Off the limb of that tree right into the middle of it," said the director.

"But . . . it's dirty water!" said Mrs. Gribble, faintly.

"Ah, but look at the location!" said Montague. "The background is wonderful and the water isn't more than four feet deep."

"I won't!" cried Mrs. Gribble. "I can't!"

"You must," said the director, with firmness. "I can't spoil this picture just because you're squeamish about a little dirt. We will help you into the tree. Hurry, please, the light is failing."

The habit of obedience prevailed; Mrs. Gribble was assisted into the tree, complaining bitterly.

"It's so far!" said she, looking down at the pool.

"What? A little jump like that?" said the director. "Now we can't rehearse this because we haven't another costume for you. We'll make it the first time. Get out on the limb as far as you can and when I give the word, jump. Make as much of a splash as you can and exit on the other side of the pool. Got the lines, Charlie? All right. Now, Miss Aldine, as soon as you are ready, please."

"I'm afraid!" said the lady. "It's too far!"

"Kain't yo' see yo' got her scairt to death?" demanded Martha, from the brink. "She ain't no divin' Venus, she ain't! Miss Addie, le's quit dis play actin' an' go home!"

"Silence!" commanded Montague. "Now then, Miss Aldine!"

"Miss Aldine!" sniffed Martha. "Yo' wait till her husban' hears 'bout dis foolishness!"

"Ready?" shouted Montague. "Now then—jump!"

Mrs. Gribble looked at the branches above her head, at the pool below and closed her eyes.

"I ca-an't!" she quavered.

"Why don't you jump?" bellowed Montague.

Mrs. Gribble loosed her hold and fell; the black water closed over her head with a mighty splash. She reappeared, festooned with green tendrils and moss, half strangled and sputtering.

“Out! Out on the other side!” yelled Montague.

Mrs. Gribble dragged herself to the bank, a bedraggled spectacle calculated to win pity from any masculine heart. Martha ran to her with the blanket which Montague had provided. Mrs. Gribble, weeping hysterically, allowed herself to be led to a tree and leaned against the trunk for support.

“Dis is enough monkeyshines!” said Martha sternly. “Yo’ heah me, Miss Addie? Dis is enough!”

Montague and Dupree had their heads together in close consultation.

“Oh, Miss Aldine!” said the director.

“Yes,” answered a weak voice. “What is it now?”

“Get that dress washed to-night,” said Montague, “and have it ready the first thing in the morning. We’ll have to make this scene over again. Charlie ran out of film.”

Mrs. Gribble slipped to the ground in a faint.

V

ELMER GRIBBLE sat by the side of the bed and held his wife’s hand. A smaller man might have found the opportunity to say “I told you so.”

“I do not know anything about such matters,” said Mr. Gribble, “but it seems to me

that you are legally bound to fill this engagement. It would be regarded as a—a sort of a contract——”

“I didn’t agree to let that brute Montague drown me!” wailed Mrs. Gribble. “Oh, Elmer, if you could have seen that filthy mudhole! If you care anything for me at all—anything at all!”

“There, there, Addie,” said Mr. Gribble, soothingly. “If you’re sure that you won’t want to go back next week——”

“I hope I’ll never see a moving picture studio again!” cried Mrs. Gribble. “I hope I’ll never see a film again! Oh, Elmer, get me out of this scrape and I’ll never say ‘movie’ to you as long as I live!”

“I will do the best I can,” said Mr. Gribble. “I will see this man Montague to-morrow morning.”

Mrs. Gribble wept and fell asleep to dream that Buck Parvin and the camera man were trying to throw her into the Grand Canyon of the Colorado while James Montague stood by and talked of Art and the courage required of a stunt actress. Mr. Gribble still held her hand, patting it gently from time to time. His emotions did not appear upon the surface, but inside of him there was an immense satisfaction and, at wicked intervals, a desire to laugh.

The next morning Buck Parvin, adjusting a shirt of mail in the door of his dressing room,

observed another stranger who seemed to know the way to Montague's office.

“There goes prosperity on the hoof,” said Buck to Ben. “Head up and tail over the dashboard, too. You reckon he wants to have a picture made of himself?”

Mr. Montague looked up at his visitor and grinned.

“It worked, did it?” said he.

“Like a charm!” said Mr. Gribble. “I am to tell you that you are a brute. Accept my thanks and congratulations on a very complete job.”

“I did have to be a bit rough with her,” said Montague, “but you said the case was desperate. I think the cure will be lasting.”

“I am sure of it,” said Mr. Gribble, taking out his pocketbook. The check which he laid in front of the director bore a signature but was otherwise blank. “Fill it in yourself,” said Mr. Gribble, “and go as far as you like. It's worth it.”

James Montague folded the check carefully and tearing it across, dropped it into the waste-paper basket.

“A laugh is the scarcest thing in the world,” said he. “Your wife has handed me several. Shall we consider our original agreement void and the account closed?”

That evening Mr. Gribble searched high and low but could not find his wife. The servants were also missing. As a last resort he entered

the kitchen and there discovered Mrs. Gribble in the act of frying a pan of breaded veal cutlets.

"Addie!" said he.

"I told Boggs and the cook that they could take the afternoon and evening off," said she.

"We'll have an old-fashioned dinner, Elmer."

"With brown gravy?" said Mr. Gribble.

"Yes, and mashed potatoes. . . . There, Elmer, that'll do! You mustn't hug the cook. She's busy!"

This may or may not be the reason why James Montague is wearing a very handsome diamond ring.

THE END



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Buck Parvin and the movies;

